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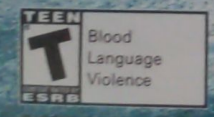
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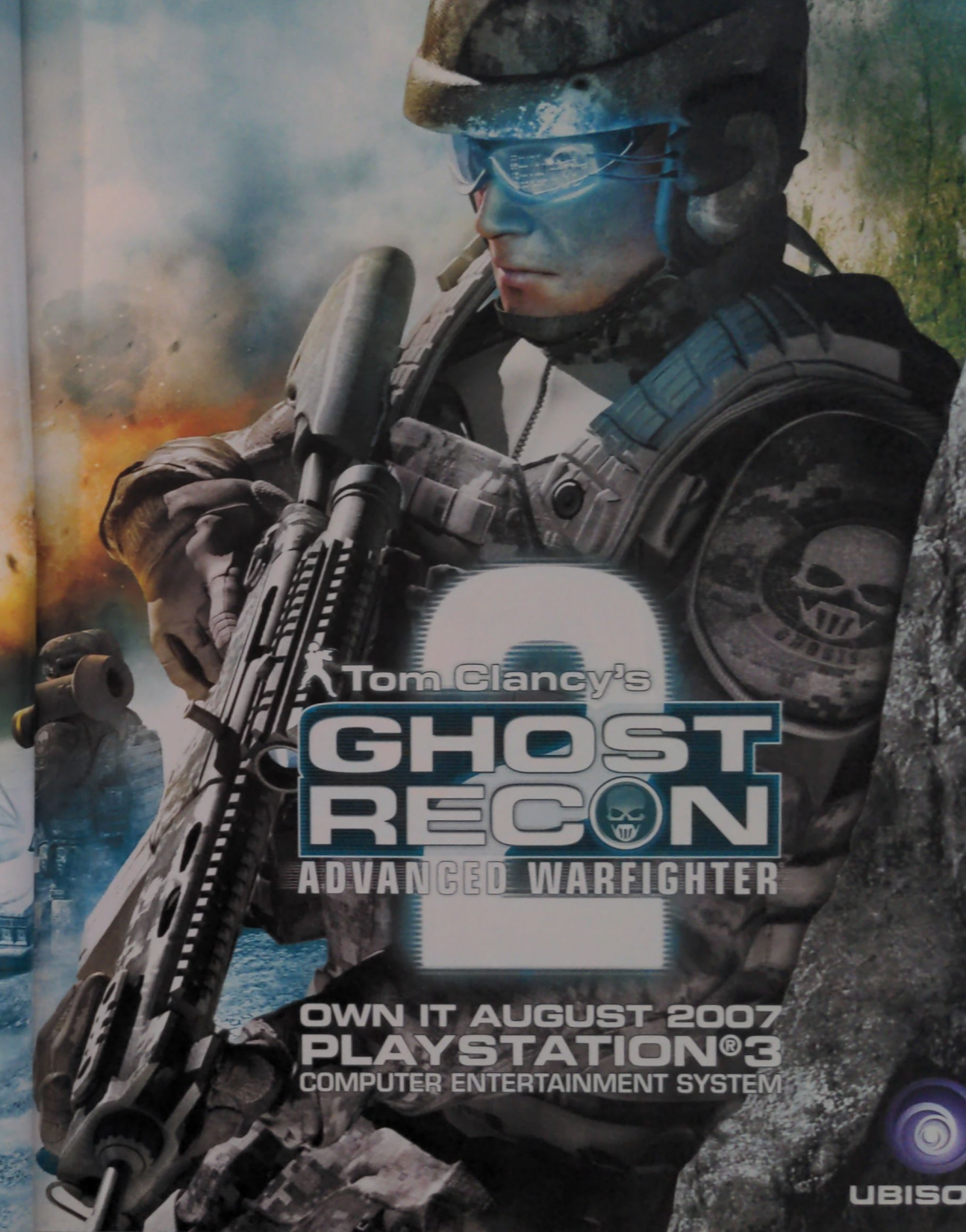


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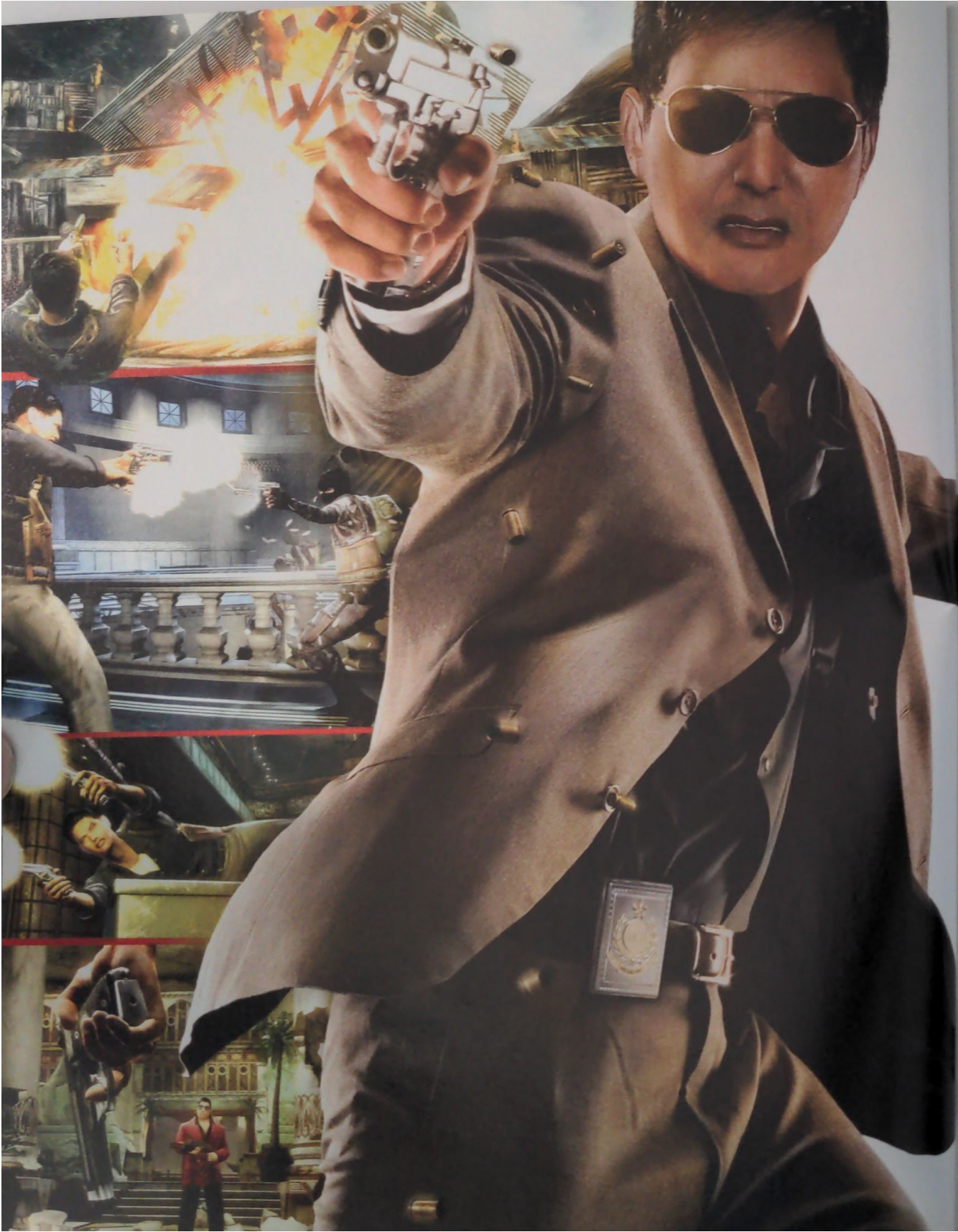


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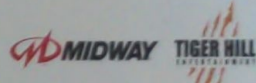
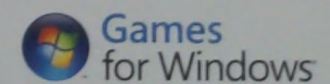
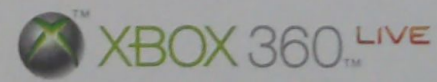
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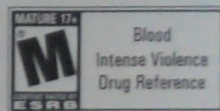
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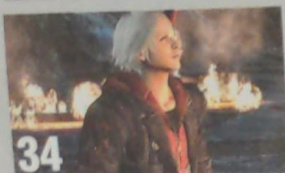




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MY SLICE OF E3

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The new E3 was the minor mess that I thought it would be, but it certainly could have been worse. I could bore you with plenty of pluses and minuses about the whole event, but instead I will focus on what really matters, and that's the games.

I was really surprised to see how many casual games were at the show, and quite frankly, how many of them I thought would actually be a good time. Now, I'll warn you: I'm a hardcore gamer. If it doesn't have 60 different button combinations or offer intense, non-stop gameplay, I'm generally not interested.

That said, I found a lot of stuff that caught my attention, including THQ's DeBlob, EA's Smarty Pants, and especially Sony's LittleBigPlanet (developed by Media Molecule). These games are the very definition of casual, but at the same time they really showed how casual doesn't necessarily have to mean shallow or short.

Of course, games like Rock Band and Guitar Hero III – the pinnacle of games that anyone can pick up and play but can challenge a hardcore gamer for months – had fantastic showings. The music genre isn't going anywhere soon, and I'm excited to see all the new ways gaming is expanding not only the market, but the way people look at entertainment. I love music; I live with music in every room of the house and on my iPod, but there is nothing quite like experiencing music the way you can with these two games. It has truly changed the face of music forever. I can't listen to an album without wishing I could play along.

I also have to give credit to all the original downloadable content finding its way to Xbox Live and PlayStation Network these days. Sony especially impressed me with games like Pixel Junk Racers, Echochrome, and Everyday Shooter. Sure they can't really compare with epics like BioShock that cost tens of millions of dollars to make, but in their own way they are fun at its most basic level, and once you catch the bug you just can't stop playing.

Finally, there are tons and tons of the games that are closest to my heart. The giant, super-budget games that squeeze every ounce of power out of their respective systems. These games are easy to find throughout the pages of this issue so I'll let you explore those on your own, but I will say Call of Duty 4 simply blew me away once again, and was easily my game of the show.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Silversun Pickups, Transformers, iPhone (I Want One So Bad, But I'm Waiting For V2.0), My New Electra Cruiser **Dislikes:** Waiting For The New Seasons Of Weeds And Dexter (I Wish It Was David Carradine, Not Keith Carradine, Joining The Cast), AFK People In Alterac Valley (If You Want To Be Lame, Join The Alliance) **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Guitar Hero II & III, BioShock, Rock Band, Everyday Shooter, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Assassin's Creed, Picross DS

Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** The Dinobots Being Considered For The Second Transformers Film, World War Hulk (Every Hero Gets Smashed By This Green Goliath), Battling For Achievement Point Supremacy Against Randy Pitchford (Does This Guy Even Sleep?), Extras **Dislikes:** Saying Goodbye To Harry Potter (It Was A Good Run, Kids, Sniff), Obnoxious Brewers Fans (Here Come My Cubbies! Eat It!) **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock, Grand Theft Auto IV, Rock Band, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Tim Buckley – Goodbye And Hello, Ratatouille, Totally Getting Ripped Delts, How Much Nicer Santa Monica Is Than Downtown L.A., Bruno's Italian Restaurant **Dislikes:** Ann Coulter (Manorexic Psycho!), Stifling Humidity, Not Eating For 12+ Hours At A Time, Not Being Rich Enough To Afford All The Awesome Games Coming Out This Fall **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08, Picross DS, Rock Band, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows, AMC's Mad Men, Orange Pop, Selected Things About The New E3, The White Stripes' Icky Thump **Dislikes:** Michael Vick – Pure Scum, Irish Pub Music, Miller's Assumption That Being A Super-Taster Makes Him Better Than The Rest Of Us **Current Favorite Games:** Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008, All-Pro Football 2K8, Jeanne D'Arc, Rock Band, BioShock, Picross DS

Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Learning 2 Heal (Lifeblood Is Total Hax), Not Being Exhausted After A Bike Ride, Chicago's Awesome Aquarium, They Might Be Giants – The Else, His Dark Materials **Dislikes:** Heal Aggro, Defective Cables (I Swear Guitar Hero Isn't This Green), Biking Through Soup **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Call Of Duty 4, Civilization IV: Beyond The Sword, Majesty, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Super Mario World

Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Harry Potter Reading Binges (Take That, Social Life), The New E3 (For The Most Part), Robo-Raiden, "Returning" Matt's CD, Ransacking **Dislikes:** Grudgingly Admitting That Bumblebee Is Kind Of Cool Now, Getting The Red Ring Of Death, Matt "Forgetting" His Inspirational CD On My Desk, That Chevybacca Isn't At Every Press Conference **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock, Blue Dragon, Eternal Sonata, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, LittleBigPlanet, Assassin's Creed

Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Creating New Star Wars Fans, Ham Of All Glazes, Harry Potter And The Unhealthy Reading Obsession, A World Of Super-Taster/Philosopher Kings **Dislikes:** Mayflies, The Fact That I Am Currently 40 Percent Infections, The Interminable Wait For Another Transformers Movie, Wrestling **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect, Lair, Killzone 2, Assassin's Creed, Need For Speed: Carbon, Rock Band, Fallout 3, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Pac-Man Championship Edition

Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Gammington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** Bryan's Sweet Porn 'Slache, Pending Football Season, Getting Peter Moore To Do A Shot Of Bushmills (What A Trooper), Creative Harry Potter Spoilers **Dislikes:** Barker Hanger (Talk About A Ghost Town), Lack Of New Game Announcements At E3, CNN's Slow Descent Into Becoming E! Entertainment Television **Current Favorite Games:** NCAA Football 08, Civilization IV: Beyond The Sword, BioShock, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Assassin's Creed

Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** King Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters, The Abyss (Turns Out It's Still A Good Movie), L.L. Hawaiian BBQ (Why Aren't You In Minnesota?), E3 Parties **Dislikes:** Waking Up An Hour Early The Morning After E3 Parties, Joe Cutting In Line In Front Of Me And The Wendy's Lady Who Did Nothing, Billy's Invitations To The Petting Zoo Since "The Incident" **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Resident Evil 5, Tomb Raider Anniversary, Guitar Hero III

Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Rhythm **Interests:** Alex Robinson's Tricked, When Bands Tour Before Their New Album Is Released (You Get A Nice Mix Of Old Stuff Since They Don't Want New Tracks To Show Up On The Internet), Two Harbors, MN **Dislikes:** My Stupid RAZR Phone (I Need A Working Screen To Call People, Dammit!), Joe's Stockade Of Bouncy Balls **Current Favorite Games:** Borderlands, Rock Band, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Contra 4, BioShock, Call Of Duty 4

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PUBLISHER

Cathy Preston

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Andrew McNamara

EDITORS

Executive Editor Andrew Reiner

Senior Editor Matt Heigson

Senior Associate Editor Matthew Kato

Associate Editors

Adam Bliessenner • Joe Juba • Matt Miller

Ben Reeves • Bryan Vore

Content Manager Matt Bertz

Mascol Arthur

PRODUCTION

Art Director Thomas Blutin

Production Director Curtis Fung

Production Assistant Rachel Nimerfrish

CONTRIBUTORS

Photographer Jonathan Kannari

GAME INFORMER ONLINE

Managing Online Editor Billy Berghammer

Online Production Assistant Nick Ahrens

Associate Online Editor Jeff Cook

ADVERTISING SALES

MINNEAPOLIS

Rob Born

Associate Publisher

(612) 486-6155 • Fax: (612) 486-6101

rob@gameinformer.com

WEST COAST

Damon Watson

West Coast Advertising Director

(310) 450-3260 • Fax: (310) 450-3571

damon@gameinformer.com

EAST COAST

Suzanne Lang

East Coast Advertising Sales Director

(718) 832-5575 • Fax: (718) 832-5569

suzanne@gameinformer.com

MINNEAPOLIS

Amy Arnold

Advertising Coordinator and Online Sales

(612) 486-6154 • Fax: (612) 486-6101

amy@gameinformer.com

Matt Edgar

Advertising Assistant

(612) 486-6152 • Fax: (612) 486-6101

matte@gameinformer.com

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1 (866) 844-GAME (4263)

Circulation Manager

Paul Anderson • (612) 486-6100

Circulation Services

Ted Katzung • (612) 486-6107

ted@gameinformer.com

Information Systems Manager

Paul Hedgcock

paulhedgcock@gameinformer.com

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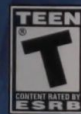
Deeply moving story combined with mesmerizing music.



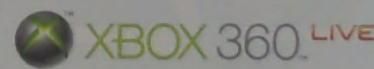
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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



1 The gals from Sega – Tali Fischer, Jennie Sue, and Thu Nguyen – give Nick their best Bond girl impression 2 The GI Online Crew – Jeff, Nick, and Billy – bro-down with Infinity Ward's Mark Rubin and Grant Collier 3 Sandbox Strat's Bobz "Pickle King" Fleischer, Jay Fitzloff (who you might remember as the Gonzo Gamer), Usman Baporia, and Fanali receive life advice and wisdom from Ron Jeremy, one of the world's most respected actors 4 The Namco gang – Rob Ely, Arne Cual-Pedroso, Robert Cogburn, Melody Pfeiffer – rehearse their new stage production of "The Music Man" 5 Some GI staffers debut their new rock band – 2 Drink Minimum – at E3! 6 Queens of the Stone Age rock EA/MTV Games's Rock Band party at the Troubadour in L.A. Fun Fact: Josh Homme of QOTSA is like seven feet tall, seriously 7 Bethesda's Erin Losi tames the big steel stud at The Saddle Ranch Chop House on the Sunset Strip. Later she would ride the bull 8 Andy gets crazy with Ubisoft's Jade Raymond and Epic's heartthrob, CliffyB. He's so dreamy...sigh



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GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today

THE QUESTION:
What games have you gone back to play (or replay) during the dry summer gaming season?

With programs that allow me to run classic id games like Heretic and Doom on my new rig, I've been playing those a lot for nostalgia's sake. I've also taken a liking to playing System Shock 2 in multiplayer mode.
mitch_the_swish

I always play San Andreas in the summer, normally in June. I have absolutely no idea why. This year was my third year.
DellMeat_TestStoak



■ GTA: San Andreas

I finally picked up Metroid Prime 2 again. The fact that there has been a Metroid game out for almost three years that I haven't completed multiple times, let alone once, is one of the scariest skeletons in my closet.
TrueNerd

I've been playing Star Fox on the SNES (thank God that thing still works). It's odd how I've had the game for 10 years and I still have a ball every time I play it.
Rabid Chipmunk



■ Star Fox

I literally dusted off my SNES to play NHLPA '98. One minute into playing and I already was missing the goalie delete feature. The player ratings were brutal. Gretzky was only a 77 overall, and there was this one guy with a 15 rating. How can you make it into the NHL with a 15?
The Quagmire

I've been going through the Ratchet and Clank series, collecting the platinum bobs and leveling up all the weapons. It never gets old blowing through armies of baddies.
f7eekda005

I've been playing a lot of Chrono Trigger for the first time, some GTA: Vice City, and a little Vectorman here and there. Anything to make the days pass quicker.
tallenange20

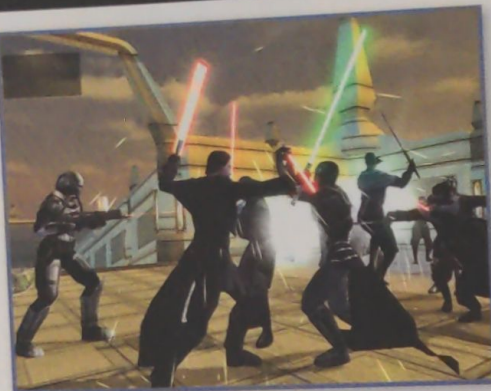
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WE WANT REVAN

I was just wondering if you had any news as to whether or not there will be a Knights of the Old Republic 3. I know LucasArts is making The Force Unleashed, but couldn't they at least give a developer permission to start making a new KotOR?

Grant Rogers
Via yahoo.com

■ Alas, another E3 has come and gone, and still there was no announcement of Knights of the Old Republic 3. We're just as anxious as you are to know the fate of this series, but a representative from LucasArts could only say, "Knights of the Old Republic is a very important franchise to LucasArts, but we have no announcements regarding it at this time." Fans shouldn't lose hope yet. No one is saying the franchise is dead, and the best things in the Star Wars universe usually come in trilogies, like the original trilogy and the Timothy Zahn trilogy.



■ Knights of the Old Republic 2

equipped with advanced, video game-style stat tracking, we could have answers to all of the burning questions: How many boxes have we smashed? How many health packs have we used? How many levels have we gained? Finally, for the Packer fans, how many interceptions have we thrown? The world may never know.

VANISHING ACT

I just finished reading issue 171, and I noticed something slightly amiss. The Connect Ten feature, a staple of all the issues I've gotten, was gone! Instead, there was the Connect Debate and Connect Gamer. Are these new features going to replace Connect Ten? Or was there not enough room for it?

D. Sheehan
Via yahoo.com

■ There are several parts of the Connect section that are used on a rotating basis. You might not see Debate, Gamer, Ten, or Culture in every issue, but we always try to fit a couple in alongside the staples like Interview and Opinion. Don't worry – there will be another Connect Ten list for you to disagree with in the coming months.

RISEING TOLL

I am a 30-year-old gamer – that's a long career, and it shows no sign of ending. I've played a lot of World War II shooters in that time, and I recently got to thinking: Exactly how many virtual Nazis have I wiped out? Wolfenstein, Battlefield, Medal of Honor, Call of Duty – these are all games I've spent countless hours playing. What does that leave me for a body count? If I average two kills for every minute of gameplay, and assume I've played a total of 1,000 hours between all WWII games, that's 120,000 Nazis! I actually may be underestimating my total, but I was wondering if you had ever done the math.

Jeremiah Smith
Via hotmail.com

■ Whoa. No, we hadn't ever done the math, but that is a disturbing figure. Quantifying your gaming experience can really put things into perspective. If only real life were

ping with both hands, and one missed note screws you up. Don't give us crap about how you have seven buttons and a turntable – Guitar Hero necessitates coordination between the strum bar and the fret buttons, not just button pressing. Try strumming 17.3 notes per second on "Trogdor," then come cry to us about your precious Beatmania.

Anonymous
Via yahoo.com

■ It's no surprise that, as the most popular music game ever, Guitar Hero has its share of staunch supporters. Once Rock Band releases, it will be interesting to see if a rivalry develops between the two series and their fans. They could go at each other's throats, like David Lee Roth versus Van Halen. On the other hand, they could work together to bring better music to the world, like Spinal Tap and the Folksmex.

PURE COMEDY GOLD

I was reading your July issue and I noticed a mistake on your Calendar. On July 13 you have a small remark about the Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix movie. You mention that Daniel Radcliffe is 30 years of age. What? I went online and did some research on him, and found that he is in fact 18 years old.

Andrew Caud
Via msn.com

■ See, it's funny because the kids in those movies are getting old! Sure, they aren't 30

HEROIC RETORT

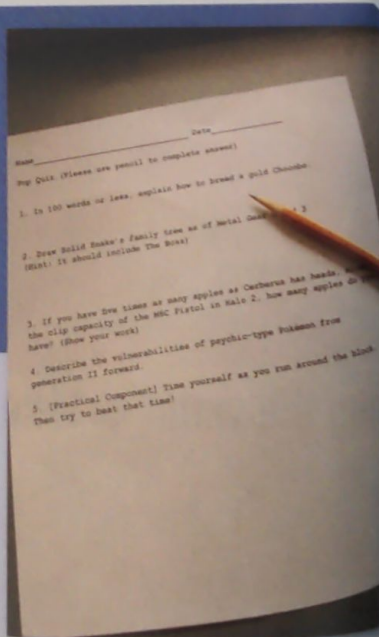
I had to respond to Mr. Der's letter in the last issue talking about how much better Konami's music games are than Guitar Hero. There are, in fact, sections in Guitar Hero II and Guitar Hero '80s that clock in at over 1,200 notes per minute, particularly Buckethead's "Jordan." There is no possible way to 100% the song other than tap-

STUDY GUIDE

During the school year, my English class was taking a test on *Fahrenheit 451*. What can I say? I didn't read the book. I came to the question, "What character in Greek Mythology was tortured for giving fire to the humans?" Lucky for me, I was playing God of War II, so I wrote down Prometheus, and got the question right! This taught me that video games are more important than reading. I'm so smart.

John Carroll
Westland, MI

■ Way to fail that test by one less point, John! You can learn all kinds of crazy stuff from video games...but not everyone is fortunate enough to be tested on it. Therefore, we have compiled a short essay quiz (no cop-out multiple guess questions) for you to display your knowledge. Just write out your responses on a separate sheet of paper, then repeatedly show your answers to all of your friends. They will be impressed.



BIONIC WOMAN

SEPT 26 WED 9/8c NBC

nbc.com/bionic

yet, but by using hyperbole to draw attention to fact that they are aging faster than their characters, pure comedy gold is created. Of course, it probably seems less funny now, but explaining the joke will suck the humor out of any punchline, right? Sigh. We know, we know – it wasn't a great joke to begin with. Reiner wrote it.

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH

What games would you recommend for a person who just bought a PSP?

Addison Allen
Via gmail.com

■ Even though some people will complain that the PSP's software lineup is less than amazing, that doesn't mean the system hasn't built up a stable of quality titles since its release. If you've recently purchased a PSP and want some recommendations, here's a short list of our favorites that you should consider checking out:

- Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops
- Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
- Dexter
- Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords
- Lumines II
- Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror
- Tekken: Dark Resurrection
- Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters
- Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth

AAAARG!

Your article in Issue 171 about Alternate Reality Game renewed my confidence in my most trusted gaming magazine. I have followed the genre for quite some time, constantly intrigued, not only by the games and their prizes, but also the mystery enshrouding the motivations of those perpetuating the contests. But as I read the article, a very substantial ARG stood out in my mind, yet I found no mention of it in the article: the Publius Enigma. Similar to the Nine Inch Nails ARG cited in your article, the Publius Enigma began with Pink Floyd and their 1995 album *The Division Bell*. I consider this to be the forerunner of ARGs, using the Internet to spread. I just thought this would be an interesting addendum to your article.

Clay Adams
Whitehouse, TX

■ Thanks for the contribution, Clay. While the experts we spoke with agreed that *The Beast* is probably the first full-fledged ARG, you are correct to point out that the genre didn't just suddenly spring into being. It evolved, drawing influence from precursors like the Publius Enigma. We didn't mean to diminish the contributions of the efforts that came before *The Beast*, but that project is where many of the concepts coalesced and began to define ARGs as we understand them today.

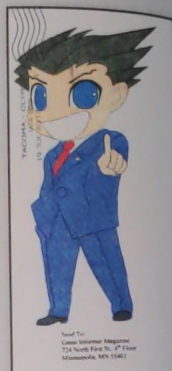
READER ART

SEPTEMBER WINNER!

JOSHUA ADAMS
Can you guess how many Happiness Tokens and Balloons you need to collect in *The Darkness*?

Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault. All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be returned.

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MEGAN BECK
Hold it! Who could object to a chibi-style Phoenix Wright?

JUSTIN HAMMOND

"Boi-oi-oi!" That's the sound the diving board is making. We repeat, the diving board



JOSE GADDIEL DIAZ

Just equip the Boots of Springheel Jack, hop on the roof, and peg it with arrows. Problem solved

FREDDY J. BRUCE
Gwa! Take whatever you want! Just don't make Dirge of Cerberus 2!



MOUA YANG
Little Red Riding Hood sure grew up fast



BROOKE BURDICK
It is a rare pleasure to beat up Piñatas!

He's received the highest commendations for bravery. Countless decorations for honor and selflessness. But Master Chief's greatest achievement reaches far beyond what any medal could ever hope to commemorate.

For the men and women of the 26th century, he is a human embodiment of possibility, the last Spartan standing against an angry tide. This strength of spirit is forged through his legend.



Jericho VII. The Battle of Reach. High Charity. Tales rife with sacrifice and courage. Tales that grow, flourish, and inspire.

And while he shapes his own history, he in turn shapes the history of all who follow.

For no matter what horrors are released upon the day, they cannot match the reply of soldiers emboldened with his spirit, an army of Master Chiefs unto themselves. **BELIEVE**

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XBOX 360 LIVE



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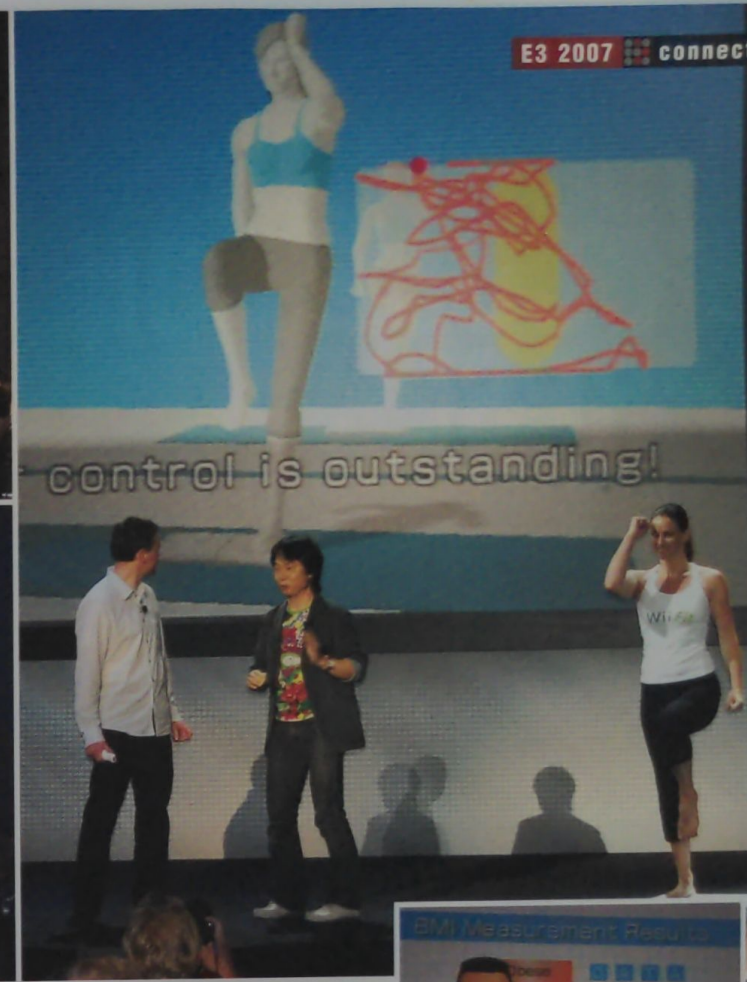
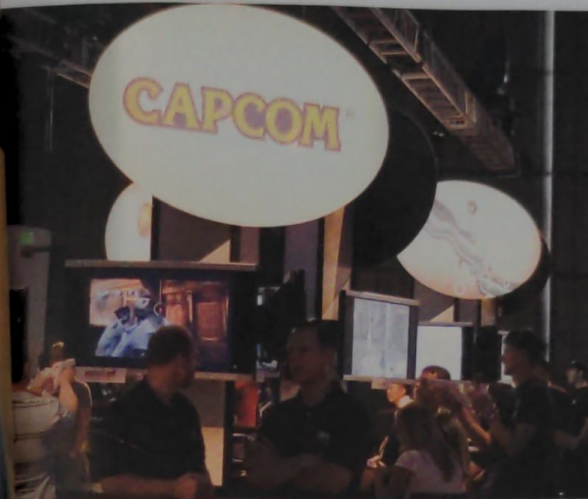
Breaking News, Views, And Technology From
The Cutting Edge Of Gaming



E3 has changed, but it's still the beacon that sets the tone for the rest of the year and beyond. This year, the messages from the big three console companies – Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony – couldn't be more different from one another. Their press conferences were reflective of each company's particular place at this moment in time, and yet the battle amongst them for the attention of gamers is as fierce as ever. Read on as Game Informer analyzes what they said, and what they had to say for themselves.



MEDIA & BUSINESS SUMMIT



MICROSOFT FOCUSES ON THE PRESENT

2007 TO BE BIG YEAR FOR 360



■ Microsoft's Jeff Bell

Microsoft held its traditional E3 press conference in a less-than-traditional surrounding, choosing to address the assembled media at Santa Monica High School. The venue's open-air amphitheater was a lovely setting, and at times ironically apt given that some of Microsoft's announcements were met with only the sound of the summer crickets. In terms of getting its message across, Microsoft did a great job of reminding everyone just how many sweet games it's got coming out for the Xbox 360 by the end of the year. Unfortunately, the company did not unveil any exciting announcements or much that the public hasn't seen.

Former corporate vice president Peter Moore (see page 44 for more on this situation) kicked off the proceedings on a shaky note by falling out of Rock Band while playing guitar to the Hives' "Main Offender." Moore's less than impressive turn on the axe was punctuated by accidentally pausing the game a couple times and getting lost in Rock Band's pause menu. Regardless, the console itself is rocking hard. Citing NPD numbers, Moore stated that 5.6 million 360 units have been sold in North America, with 18.1 million copies of software sold since the release of the PS3 and Wii — whose combined software sales doesn't compete with the numbers for the 360.

20 GAME INFORMER

After highlighting one of the system's exciting exclusives, Mass Effect, and showing a montage filled with titles such as Splinter Cell: Conviction, Beautiful Katamari, Stranglehold, and others, Moore took the presentation in a different direction. He announced Viva Piñata: Party Animals (which is naturally a party game) and gave way to Jeff Bell, corporate vice president of

global marketing. Bell further spoke to Microsoft's move toward a more casual audience, as the company has an exclusive 360 version of DVD movie trivia game Scene It Lights, Camera, Action, which comes with four special controllers. Speaking of movies, the system's HD media download service now features movies such as *The Waterboy*, *Tarzan*, and *Armageddon* thanks to a deal with Disney.

Had this been the extent of Bell's presence, the night would have gone

better for Microsoft. Instead, what transpired was a cringe-inducing attempt to be hip by Bell that had the audience laughing out loud in derision. After erroneously promising that EA Sports titles on the 360 will be "that's right, twice as fast" because of its promise to run at 60 frames per second, Bell brought out New Orleans Saints running back Reggie Bush for a demo of Madden NFL 08. The two proceeded to "get it on," in the parlance of the radio-voiced Bell, with Bush running for a touchdown amidst stiff banter typed up on the teleprompters around the amphitheater that the crowd could see. Game Informer found out from sources that the pair weren't even playing an actual game, but were moving to pre-recorded footage. After E3, we even heard talk that Microsoft has internally decided to never let Bell in front of a crown again.

Thankfully, both Moore and Shane Kim, head of Microsoft Game Studios, brought the press conference back to one of the Xbox 360 strengths — a great lineup of games. Impressive titles for RPG *Lost Odyssey*, *Grand Theft*



■ Peter Moore tries to rock out with Harmonix team members on Rock Band

ARCADE ACTION

Microsoft is promising 100 titles for Xbox Live Arcade by the end of the year, including *Marathon: Durandal*, *Space Giraffe*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Golden Axe*, *Hexic 2*, *Wing Commander Arena*, and *War World*.



■ Marathon: Durandal



■ Hexic 2



■ Bomberman Live

HALO 3



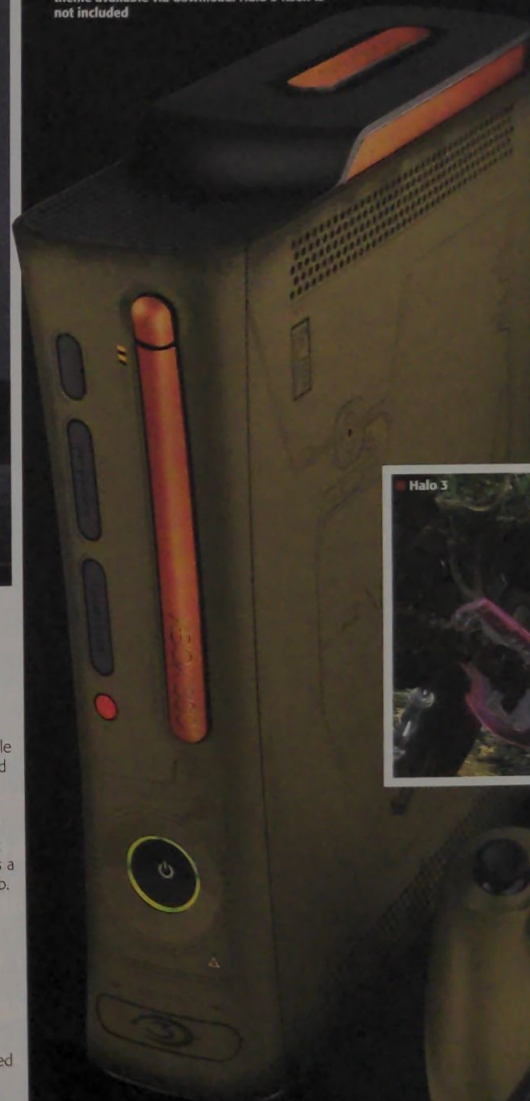
■ Viva Piñata: Party Animals

Auto IV, and *Resident Evil 5* were shown, *Devil May Cry 4* was shown on the system, and developer Infinity Ward stole the evening with its demo of *Call of Duty 4* — which looked awesome. That's saying something, considering that the demo didn't consist of much more than a soldier crawling in the grass and stealthily moving around abandoned farm houses. Of course, hearing Infinity Ward studio head Grant Collier say, "we are going deep, and we're going hard" was a bit of accidental comedy that Collier pulled off with aplomb. The crowd also chuckled during the demo of Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* because of producer Jade Raymond's nervous laughter after an in-game bug in the presentation caused a dead guard to conspicuously float in mid-air.

Of course, the crown jewel of all Xbox 360 software is *Halo 3*, and it ended the proceedings with a bang. Thankfully so too, because the two-minute montage of gameplay footage and in-game cinematics was a crowd pleaser after Moore's announcement of the *Halo 3*-branded Xbox 360 was met with apathetic silence.

For more on the Xbox 360 games at E3, please check out our continuing coverage on page 34.

This limited-edition console comes out in September, and comes with a matching controller, 20GB hard drive, headset, Play & Charge kit, Ethernet cable, component AV cable, one month Live Gold membership, HDMI port, and offers exclusive *Halo 3* gamer pictures and a theme available via download. *Halo 3* itself is not included.



REPORT CARD

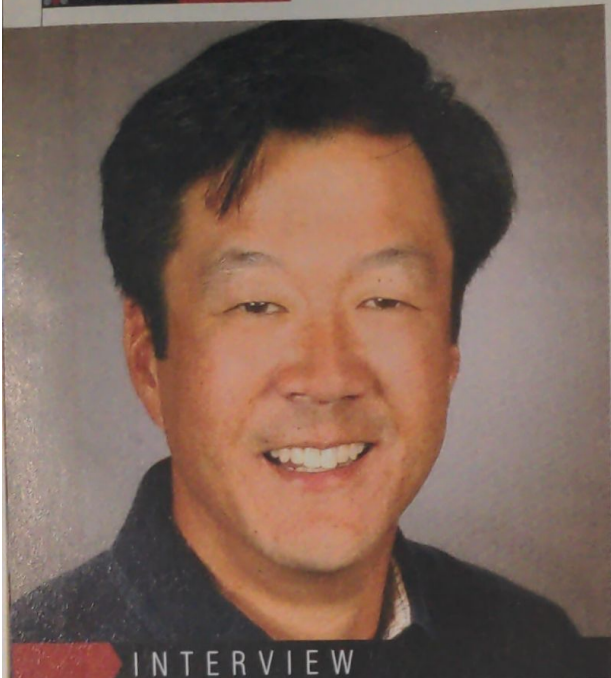
A year after delivering its best E3 press conference, 2007 finds the company coming back down to Earth. Although there's no arguing that the 360 is stocked with great games, it was disappointing that Microsoft spent 90 minutes telling us stuff we already knew instead of extending its mindshare with more software exclusives, announcements beyond this year, or even a price drop. The presence of marketing fluff like Jeff Bell didn't help the perception that perhaps Microsoft is pausing while it holds the knife above its competitors in the next-gen fight.

GRADE = C+



■ Halo 3





INTERVIEW

SHANE KIM

CORPORATE VICE PRESIDENT, MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

Some people are disappointed that at its E3 press conference, Microsoft didn't show much that was new. What are your thoughts on this?

That was our strategy. I think we executed our plan very, very well. We made our announcements and our promises before, and now we're really delivering that. This is a very important holiday, our third holiday, and our competitors should be in free supply. Customers are going to be in a position where they are deciding which next-generation console they want to purchase, and we got great momentum getting in. I did mention future titles like Halo Wars, Fable 2, Too Human, and so forth, but as far as everything we showed, we really wanted to focus on 2007. I know there are people who wanted to see a big splash, big announcements, and so forth, and I understand that there are some people disappointed about that, but our agenda was to communicate: "Everything we talked about, you're going to get this holiday."

Any thoughts on your competitors' press conferences?

I did not see Nintendo's, but I did watch a fair amount of Sony's. We have a lot of respect for Kojima-san and Metal Gear Solid, of course, and it's nice that Kiteau-san [ed.-Konami North American and European head] himself said, hey maybe PS3's not the right platform for them. That's Konami saying that, not us saying that. Other than that, we had already shown most of the third-party content the night before, so I don't think there's anything new there. We've always said Microsoft Game Studios has to be a competitive advantage when it comes to delivering exclusive content. That's what the job of the first parties is, and I will put our first-party lineup against theirs any day.

Microsoft announced some more moves into the casual gaming department, but with the popularity of the Wii, do you think that third parties will gravitate towards it instead of Microsoft?

First of all, it's unclear historically how many third parties have made a lot of money on Nintendo platforms. Historically it's been dominated by first-party, and the same thing is happening on Wii. So I know that the third parties are excited about the momentum behind Wii and they are trying to bring more content for Wii. And because of the controller scheme it has to be relatively unique – and that's a tough proposition for most third-party publishers, because their business model is built on scale and leverage. It's difficult to leverage what they are doing on Wii across PS3 and Xbox 360. It's a problem for third parties, because the Wii is not a great platform for taking their big, epic, high-definition titles they are creating for Xbox 360 over to the Wii, so they have that issue in reverse. I think most third parties' model is built on leveraging the IP as much as possible. We'll get a lot of that Wii content, I'm convinced, in the future on Xbox 360. Things like the Simpsons – you can't make that single-platform – the license costs too much.

What are your thoughts on Adults-Only rated titles in the light of Rockstar's Manhunt 2?

Microsoft has a policy that's very clear that we do not accept AO-rated games on our platform, full stop. As a platform owner, we absolutely respect the right and defend the right for publishers and developers to create the content that they want. But we hold the line on AO-rated titles.

Is it easy for you to say you respect the right of developers to make

what they want when you've already decided that you won't put it on your system? Or to claim there's not a market for AO-rated titles when you're in a position to feed or starve that market?

I see your point. It's convenient for us to talk about it that way, but our principles are our principles. We will not allow AO content to be published on our platform. There are plenty of ways for someone who wants to create AO content to get that in the hands of consumers. It doesn't have to be on a console platform. The Internet is an open platform of significant magnitude. So, if someone really wants to make AO content, they don't have to be stymied because the publishers took a principled line.

Can you tell us about the decision to not include Halo 3 in the Halo 3 Xbox 360 bundle?

That would add significantly more cost to the bundle, because we're not going to give away Halo 3. This is a limited-edition console, and I'm not sure we emphasized that enough. We're not adding a fourth permanent SKU. There are going to be those maniacal Halo fans – and we love those fans – and this is something we wanted to make available to those people. I got another question earlier, "Why isn't it an Elite?" Well, we don't want to make people pay that much money for a Halo-themed console if that's not what they want. It's the same thing for bundling Halo 3.

Was there any anticipation of the level to which Xbox 360 consoles are being reported defective?

I don't think you anticipate a situation like this

that requires you to take a billion dollar charge (ed. – see page 42 for more). It obviously got to the point where we said it was unacceptable for us, unacceptable for our customers, so we took an unprecedented step in announcing the warranty. That's real money. But, that said, once we knew there were issues, we determined pretty quickly this was a step we wanted to take. We want to take this question out of people's minds.

Do you know what percentage of unsold Xbox 360 units still on store shelves might be defective?

It's really hard to say, because like every hardware manufacturer, we're constantly improving, adding new components, taking components out, trying to drive down costs, trying to drive more quality into the system on an ongoing basis. We have a general idea, but that can vary by country, by retailer, so anyone who says they really know doesn't really know.

Can we expect the frequency of Xbox Live Arcade titles to improve?

I believe so. We've already improved the flow of Xbox Live titles. They are getting much, much better at managing the whole process, managing the process with publishers. It's a lot easier to produce an Arcade-level title than a retail title where you typically know two years in advance that something's coming. So they will get better, I'm convinced of that.

Blockbuster has just announced it is only carrying Blu-ray movies, and the format is outselling HD-DVD. Is HD-DVD on the way out?

It's way too early to anoint any winner or loser in that regard. I don't think there's any critical mass in terms of consumer enthusiasm for either format. We see a lot more enthusiasm in Xbox Live Video Marketplace, for example, where you get high-definition movie content without having to make a decision to spend extra – whether it's for our own HD-DVD drive or Blu-ray in every PS3. Unlike when DVD came out, you don't see this mad rush for people to go, "Hey, I want to spend an awful lot of money to pick a physical format today." And that's the difference between us and Sony bet on Blu-ray because that benefits Sony. They're [with] every PS3, "You're going to pay us a little extra because we have a Blu-ray drive in the console." I think you see that in PS3 sales. Customers haven't said that's what they want.

But you still have to pay money for the HD-DVD add-on, there are rental fees for the movies, and you may even have to buy another hard drive if you're serious about high-definition content since the 20GB isn't enough.

Yes. But do you really believe that Blu-ray is taking off like that? I don't believe it. Look, Disney is one of Blu-ray's biggest supporters, and now the Walt Disney Studio is supporting us on Xbox Live Video Marketplace. They realize they aren't ready yet to make just one choice. At the end of the day they need their content to be distributed as broadly as possible. We still believe in HD-DVD, but the good news is that we've come up with this way to distribute high-definition movie content without having to make a physical media choice.

What do you think Microsoft needs to improve upon for the next year?

I think the biggest issue we have is making sure we restore and drive the consumer confidence in the hardware. That's why we took the unprecedented step with the warranty enhancement, because the rest of the program is really, really strong. If anything, we want to make sure people don't have any concerns about making the choice today to buy an Xbox 360, because Microsoft is going to stand behind the product.

I think the biggest issue we have is making sure we restore and drive the consumer confidence in the hardware.



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NINTENDO GOES CASUAL

ARE YOU READY TO GET FIT?



“My name is Reggie. And I...am...happy.” Given the breakout success of the Wii and the continuing dominance of the Nintendo DS, Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aimé has good reason to be happy. As expected, much of Nintendo's presentation was spent crowing about its recent marketplace triumphs. And why not? With the Wii fast approaching the 10 million mark worldwide and on pace to eclipse the Xbox 360 as the world's number one next-gen system and the DS at a staggering 45 million units sold, Nintendo deserved a victory lap.

Fils-Aimé went on to describe the press conference as “a celebration, and by that I don't mean just a celebration for Nintendo, but for all of us. Because we think this E3 marks a conclusive turning point for the video game market.” Elaborating, he touted the Wii's success as a sign that video games are finally becoming a true mainstream pastime—suggesting that E3 2007 would be remembered as “the moment it became finally clear that video games would take their place alongside TV, movies, and music as a staple of leisure entertainment.” Although some might argue that video games have been mainstream for nearly a decade now, and the system that made them so was called PlayStation 2, it is clear that Nintendo's “blue ocean” strategy is drawing in older, inexperienced, and female gamers into the hobby at a historic rate.

To illustrate his point, Fils-Aimé displayed some impressive demographic data that seems to bear out the success of Nintendo's new “games for everyone” philosophy. Despite Nintendo's traditionally young installed base, Nintendo buyers between 18 and 24 have risen from 15 percent to 24 percent, with players over 25 now accounting for a full third of all sales. Interestingly, the company is also breaking the game industry's usual “80/20” split along gender lines, with a full 33 percent of Nintendo hardware sales going to women in 2007.



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■ Miyamoto stated that the Wii Balance Board will be used in other titles in the future



■ The Wii Wheel will come with Mario Kart Wii

More importantly, it appears that the third-party publishing and development community are embracing the Wii to a greater degree than it did the somewhat disappointing GameCube. To date, there are 60 games in the Wii catalog and 300 for the DS available. Fils-Aime also told the audience to expect 60 new Wii and 140 new DS titles on the market by the end of the year.

After some more "wacky" clips of Nintendo fans, news reports, and general hijinks (note to Nintendo: We have access to YouTube too!), Reggie dropped the first bit of real news unveiled at the conference: the Wii Zapper, a plastic gun-shaped casing that houses both the Wii remote and nunchuk analog stick. To be sold at \$19.99 sometime in 2007, the unit will function much like light guns of the past, although with the added movement the analog stick provides. Shown with the Zapper was a new Capcom title designed to go along with the peripheral, Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles, a rail shooter that distinguishes itself from Sega's popular House of the Dead series by having "Resident Evil" in the title instead of "House of the Dead." While Nintendo plans to sell the unit with an original, first-party pack-in game, fans will also be able to test their aim with Zapper titles like Medal of Honor Heroes 2 from EA and the arcade game Ghost Squad from Sega.

Although most of the show was spent reaching out to new audiences, the next segment attempted to speak to Nintendo's core audience, to mixed results. Titles shown included Soulcalibur Legends, Dragon Quest: Swords, and Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games for Wii, as well as Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword for DS. Although Reggie promised that the lineup "[will] have core gamers fighting each other to get their hands on the controller," we're not quite putting on the boxing gloves just yet. Thankfully, as always, Nintendo is bringing out some of its reliably good first-party franchises for this year, including the much-anticipated Super Smash Brothers Brawl, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass for DS, and Super Mario Galaxy. All four – particularly Galaxy – are looking quite impressive. We could have done without the live demos of the game from Nintendo fan-site bloggers (and the overlong biographical video that went with it), but let's not quibble. For those of us who have been wanting a Wii game besides Super Paper Mario and Zelda to keep us busy for more than an hour at a time, this is good news.

Next Fils-Aime addressed the press's concerns about Nintendo's online service. "We still hear questions about Nintendo 'getting serious' about online. Well, I guess I'd

answer 'What if we already did and you just didn't notice?'" To help illustrate his point, Fils-Aime cited the 5 million DS owners that have connected online for 230 million gameplay sessions. In addition, 5.6 million Virtual Console titles have been sold thus far on the Wii, with 112 titles available so far. In hopes of expanding usage, Fils-Aime announced a new program called WiiWare, which will provide smaller developers with development tools to make games to be available for sale

on the Wii Shop channel, and a new Check Mii Out Channel, which allows you to upload and vote on Mii's with other users (think amihotomoto.com for Mii's).

Responding to criticism of the lack of real multiplayer for Wii, Fils-Aime pointed to Pokémon Battle Revolution and the recently released Mario Strikers Charged, both of which feature online play. In addition, he confirmed that the popular EA Sports titles FIFA 08 and Madden NFL 08 will feature full online play. Even more encouraging, Activision's Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock will also support connected jam sessions with a special Les Paul controller. Most notable was the revelation that a Wii Mario Kart title to be released in the first quarter of 2008 will support online multiplayer and a Nintendo wheel attachment for the Wii remote. Although Fils-Aime observed, "All of this should at least suggest that we're serious about letting you show your stuff online," in light of Microsoft's stellar Xbox Live service and Sony's ambitious plans for Home, it seemed significantly less than adequate.

After attempting to satiate hardcore gamers, it was back to another segment aimed at the broader, non-gaming audience. After (yet) another video montage touting the broad appeal of the DS and Wii, followed by a somewhat puzzling speech by fan-favorite Nintendo president

Satoru Iwata, who discussed the need to "level the playing field" so novice gamers and experienced gamers can play together in order to bring in new customers. It seemed a bit unnecessary, but Iwata, among the most charming executives in the industry, still won over the crowd with his sincere delivery.

After giving Mario Galaxy the short shrift the second year running by jamming its footage into a video about a family who was given a Wii for a week and the touting of some third-party casual games, it was time for the most predictable "surprise" at any Nintendo conference:



■ The Wii Zapper

an appearance by the legendary Shigeru Miyamoto. This time though there was no rapturous new Zelda to behold, rather Wii Fit – an exercise game that utilizes a new balance board controller that senses your weight and center of gravity. The game will track your weight loss and training over time, as well as offer a number of minigames, including yoga moves, a DDR-style dance game, and

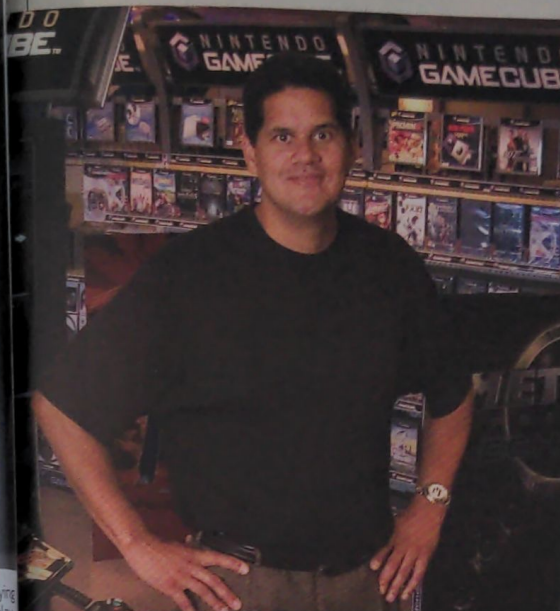
ski jumping. Is it interesting? Sure, but it did seem like an odd end to a conference that seemed much more focused on the casual market than the usual E3 audience.

For more on the games on Nintendo platforms at E3, please check out our continuing coverage starting on page 34.

REPORT CARD

Nintendo is enjoying its greatest success since the SNES era, so why did this year's E3 feel like a bit of a letdown? Well, the answer is simple: For all the success the Wii has had, it just doesn't have the breadth and quality of software across the board that it needs to become the world's number one system. While a lot of developers are getting on board with more Wii and DS-focused casual games, we were a little disheartened to see that a vast majority of the (very few) deep hardcore-oriented titles are still the same old Nintendo franchises we've known for years. As a business move, Wii Fit seems like a genius idea – we can see the *Good Morning America* reports on it already – but it's not exactly the type of thing that excites the fans who have kept Nintendo in the game even during the darkest days of the GameCube.

Grade: C



INTERVIEW

REGGIE FILS-AIME

PRESIDENT, NINTENDO OF AMERICA

Was Nintendo caught off guard by how successful the Wii has been, and did that play into the problems of hardware shortages?

We went into this planning for success. We knew we had something with Wii Sports and the strategic decision to pack it in. The fact that we've been out of stock, effectively, for 33 weeks says that demand has exceeded our expectations from that standpoint. And, in many ways, exceeded all expectations anyone could have had.... But we're very pleased with how we've done with Wii out of the gate.

Are there adjustments being made with regards to manufacturing, getting new productions lines up and running and things like that?

We are. What you can see is that, on a worldwide basis, production has been ramping up and continues to ramp up. The issue is thinking through what your total capacity should be on a year in, year out basis. You need to be careful not to overshoot that... the fact is that you can't bring these new factories up to speed overnight. Our goal is to get to the point where any consumer can walk into any retailer, find a Wii, and buy it. That's the end objective.

It's obviously selling well, and at the press conference you brought up the possibility of it being the number one overall console in the world. Microsoft has a very strong holiday lineup this year with GTA, Halo 3, and a lot of big franchises. Do you think being number one is a realistic goal, and when do you project Wii will be number one?

It's going to happen and it's going to happen on a worldwide basis. Unfortunately for Microsoft, while they have a healthy U.S. business, they don't have much business

beyond that. They announced a shortage in their annual projection that was based on shortages in Europe in terms of meeting their sell-in projections. So we sit here with very healthy sales in North America, very healthy sales in Europe and Japan. I think that any reasonable analyst gets to the point that sometime in early fall, Wii will overtake Microsoft on a worldwide basis. What happens through the holiday is all going to be based on software line-ups and available inventory.

You talked a lot about the changing demographics of gamers at the press conference, especially more older gamers, female gamers, and non-traditional gamers being attracted to the Wii. Are you going to make efforts to keep that going throughout the life of the Wii?

We certainly have internal goals. You look at something like Wii Fit in terms of an older demographic and a female demographic, it will certainly drive those consumers to be even more excited about the Wii console. As important as it is to use to expand the demographic, we want to make sure we satisfy the core gamer as well. That's why we have Super Smash Brothers confirmed for this year. That's why Super Mario Galaxy is coming out this year. That's why we announced the Zapper. All of these are important to make sure the core gamer finds satisfaction as well.

You brought up the Zapper. You alluded to a Zapper game in production. Could you tell us about that game?

I cannot tell you; I want it to be a surprise. There are multiple Zapper projects within Nintendo being worked on. Our objective with the first-party

pack-in is to drive a large installed base of the Zapper. That's why we're doing a pack-in and that's why we're launching at \$19.99. It will come packed in with a game. Later, after the holidays it will be available as a stand-alone accessory.

In looking back towards Nintendo's past, would something like Duck Hunt be packed in as a throwback to the NES light gun?

We've gotten a lot of requests for Duck Hunt on the Virtual Console. I can't confirm or deny that Duck Hunt is the title we're working on. What I can tell you is that when we announce the actual title people are going to be pleasantly surprised.

So it's something that resonates with your fan base?

Yes.

Wii Fit was a big push at the press conference. How long has it been in development and is it a project that Mr. Miyamoto spearheaded?

It is a project that Mr. Miyamoto spearheaded. He alluded to this onstage. He's become more concerned about his health. He's been working out, bicycling, and exercising for quite some time.

You made a comment at the press conference that you are serious about online. You did show Mario Kart, FIFA, Strikers, and Madden, which are good titles, but Sony and Microsoft are putting out some serious resources into developing some very ambitious services online. By any fair estimation, the Wii online service is not nearly as ambitious or big as what Live can offer now or what Sony has planned with Home.

We see online very differently from our competitors. We see online as something a broad range of consumer types should and could enjoy. Which is why we have Virtual Console. It's why we have things like the Mii Channel that's coming out. It's why we have news and forecasts. It's a much wider view of what online could be compared to simply a multiplayer, co-op mode type of experience. Now, we'll do that too. But, for us, the end game is getting consumers to pick up a remote and have a great experience. That, to us, is the goal. That could be in creating their Mii or a wide range of different activities. Our competitors, despite what they want to try and say, they're not going for a mainstream audience – not at those price points and not with very heavy first-person shooter types of games.

But what about something like Home? That would seem to be more tailored to a casual audience.

I think it's been done before, right? It's called Second Life.

One thing that is confusing is that, while you've done a great job in making Wii approachable to non- and casual gamers, the decision to make the unit Wi-Fi only has never really made sense from that perspective. If you wanted to drive older people and non-core gamers online, people that aren't as tech savvy, isn't it asking a lot of them to set up their own wireless router?

It certainly wasn't a mistake. I think the statistic is that something like 50 percent of broadband-enabled homes have a Wi-Fi system up in their home.... For consumers who want to run a wire through their home, that capability is there. We sell those adaptors through our consumer service.

Well, if 50 percent have Wi-Fi, then 50 percent don't. And historically, aftermarket add-on penetration rates aren't great. Are you worried that it limits your online audience?

As we sit here today, 40 percent of Wiis are connected. The last statistic I saw for Microsoft was in the thirties. So as we sit here today we have a better connection rate than they do. I certainly think we made the right decision.

WiiWare is a program to reach out to very small and garage developers. Can you talk about that in more specifics?

WiiWare works like this. These companies buy our development tools, which are already very affordably priced. They create content. It's their responsibility to have that content rated by the ESRB. What we do is essentially check it to make sure it plays correctly on our system, and that's it. The games will be available through the Wii Shop channel; you purchase it with Wii Points, just like the old games on Virtual Console. Our view is that the cream will rise to the top. We'll create ranking and voting mechanisms. The best games will rise to the top.

Do you have your own games that fit into that niche – original downloadable games – in development?

We have our own games in development that fit into that pipeline.

...Wii will overtake Microsoft on a worldwide basis.

THE NEW THUMB IN TOWN.
DANNY WAY'S THUMB TALKS
TO SKATE

skate: Danny's thumb, what's up?

Danny's thumb: Not much.

s: So, what's it like to be two and a quarter inches tall and pull 14-foot airs?

dt: It's scary, but it's rad, too.

s: Does fear motivate you?

dt: Not really fear; it's more the fear of succumbing to fear, letting fear win. That's what freaks me out most.

s: That's heavy. Do you like philosophy?

dt: Just Nietzsche.
The rest were posers.

s: You've been creating a ton of new tricks lately. Where's the sudden inspiration coming from?

dt: I've found sweet places to skate all over San Vanelona and I've been skating a bunch. It's all been clicking lately.

s: Describe the "Big Stub."



dt: It's like a big flip, but switch, starting with an ollie and a heelflip.

s. The 45 different game-play tricks weren't enough for you?

dt: You gotta always push it. That's what skating is.

s: Were you a big gamer before this?

dt: A little. I like shooters. Never skating games, though. Too much button-mashing.

s: Do you own any guns?

dt: No, that's more pointer finger's thing.
I'm more into vinyl figures, you know, like
tokidoki's Mozzarella.

S: Do you ever make out with those figures?
They're about your size.

dt: No, that's gross. Plus, the
don't feel right.

S: Speaking of feeling right, tell me about the flickit controls in the game.

dt: That was a smooth transition. You're quite the journalist.

s: I went to a pretty fancy school

dt: Obviously. Yeah, the game feels, you know, just like skating. Or at least how Rest-of-Danny describes it. When

grind, I feel it. When I bomb a hill, it feels good.

s: Do you and Rest-of-Danny get along?

dt: Most of the time. Sometimes he goes
little nuts and tries to pull crazy [crazy]
and ends up smashing me into stuff in the



"WHEN I GRIND, I FEEL IT.
WHEN I BOMB A HILL, IT
FEELS GOOD." — DANNY'S THUMB

process. I could do without that. But I get my revenge when I need to.

S: How?

dt: I pinch his nose closed when he sleeps. He chokes a little and wakes up gasping for breath. It's totally hilarious. He thinks he's got that condition where your throat closes up when you sleep.

s: You mean sleep apnea?

dt: Yeah, that. He's even been researching

corrective surgery for it.

S: That's kinda mean.

dt: You mess with the thumb, you get the nail.

s: I'll have to remember that.

dt: Do.

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Blood and Gore
Crude Humor
Language
Mild Violence
Tobacco Reference

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A STEP FORWARD FOR SONY

NEW PSP AND PRICE CHANGE FOR PS3

Sony had its work cut out for it this year, not only in light of its competitors' performance, but due to the fact that the company noticeably stumbled at last year's E3. In some ways, this year's press conference was unremarkable in that Sony was talking about titles that we've already heard about and which have yet to come out for the system. But the company showed that it is trying to not only rectify some problems, but improve its situation as well.

The price of the PlayStation 3 has been a contentious topic ever since Sony debuted its two-SKU, higher-priced approach, but it was happy to announce a price cut for the platform. Well, sort of. Currently, the 60GB PS3 is selling for \$499, offering a discount of \$100, and replacing the 20GB model. Meanwhile, a new 80GB version bundled with MotorStorm will debut in August. While it's great the price of the 60GB PS3 was dropped, after the press conference, Sony clarified that this is being done only to clear out stock of that version. Once that sells out, there will only be one kind of PS3 available – the 80GB one at \$599. While it's hard to see Sony's strategy as a true price cut since once the 60GB sells out it's more accurate to say you're simply getting more for your money, this is certainly good news if you don't have the system and are interested in MotorStorm. "We found very early on," said Sony Computer Entertainment president and group CEO Kaz Hirai, "that consumers react mostly to having one SKU as opposed to two."

The PS3 arguably needs more games in its catalog than a change in price, however, and at the press conference Sony promised 120 new first and third-party titles in North America through the end of March 2008, including 15 first-party exclusives by this Christmas. Known quantities such

■ If you want longer life out of your new PSP, you can use your old battery if you buy a special kit with a new cover



as Ratchet & Clank Future, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Midway's Unreal Tournament III, and Ubisoft's Haze were highlighted, and everyone was impressed when Konami's Hideo Kojima took the stage and showed off a new trailer for Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots. It's customary for MGS trailers to wow audiences, but Kojima keeps out-doing himself.

Apart from these, new faces such as Gran Turismo 5 Prologue (out in Japan this October) and Infamous were also shown. GT 5 Prologue is clearly a holdover until we get a full-on GT 5, but it will have integrated online features including 16-player races. Although details were scarce, Sony did have a partnership to tout, announcing that MMO veteran NCsoft (Tabula Rasa) is granting the PS3 exclusive console rights to some future titles based on NCsoft existing franchises as well as new properties.

Sony is slowly offering downloadable titles for PlayStation Network, and one in particular – Echochrome from Sony Japan – made a big splash at the press conference and

the show. This title and others on the Network such as LittleBigPlanet and Pain are thankfully more than just classic re-releases or slight diversions, but given the effort and money put into them, it will be interesting to see if Sony runs into the same supply problems that Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade has had.

The PSP was not neglected, and the system received its long-talked about makeover. While not a striking redesign, the handheld (which comes out in September) is now 33 percent lighter, 19 percent slimmer, and comes in two additional colors (silver and white). The new unit (which is still \$169.99) outputs content to your TV (provided it has inputs for component cables), allowing you to play PSP titles on your TV, watch UMD movies, and look at photos. If you buy a sold-separately battery cover, you can put your old PSP battery into the new PSP and get more playing time for your new handheld. Sony says that it plans to release 140 PSP games through the end of March, including God of War: Chains of Olympus, Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles, Silent Hill Origins, Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow, and more. There are also two new PSP packs available (see sidebar for more details), one of which was introduced by Chewbacca – who is suspiciously the same height as Sony's president of worldwide studios Phil Harrison....

Just as Microsoft had ended its press conference the night before with its big FPS, Halo 3, Sony closed the proceedings with in-game footage of Killzone 2 (see page 74 for more). Although the footage didn't look exactly the same as the debut trailer from two years ago, Sony and developer Guenilla Games put to rest any doubts that they could utilize the PS3 to produce some impressive-looking games.

For more on the games on Sony's platforms at E3, please check out our continuing coverage starting on page 34.

NEW PSP PACKS

Apart from the redesign of the PSP, there will be two PSP packs available this fall.

DAXTER PSP ENTERTAINMENT PACK (September 10)

- Ice Silver PSP
- Daxter PSP game
- Family Guy – The Freakin' Sweet Collection UMD
- 1 GB Memory Stick PRO Duo
- Limited Edition/\$199



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT PSP ENTERTAINMENT PACK (October 9)

- Ceramic White PSP featuring silk-screened Darth Vader image (shown on previous page)
- Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron PSP game
- Limited Edition/\$199



Gran Turismo 5 Prologue

REPORT CARD

Sony achieved what it failed to do last E3. Instead of leaving consumers with questions and nagging doubts, the company reassured and excited its fanbase. Certainly, it's good to see its platforms gaining momentum despite past snafus. The PlayStation 3 is coming to life with software, the PSP is soldiering on against the goliath that is the Nintendo DS, and the Home community service and the PlayStation Network games show that Microsoft isn't the only company with an online plan. The company has always said that it has a long-term strategy for its products, and now we're starting to see it build a strong foundation for that execution.

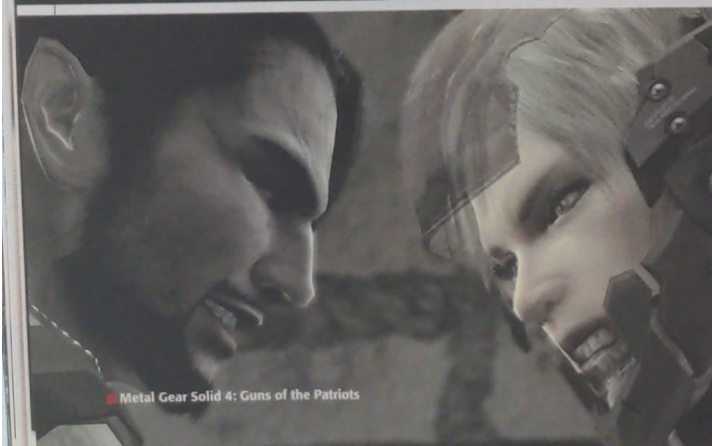
Grade: B

HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Since it unveiled its Home community hub this spring, Sony has made some additions. An open-air square featuring a movie theater, bowling alley, and other locations replaces the indoor lounge of old, and Sony's president of worldwide studios, Phil Harrison walked around with his Home avatar. He showed off the ability to take pictures from a mobile phone and import them into your Home, as well as how elements of the free service (coming this fall) can be accessed via a social network web page. Harrison also showed how you can access your PS3 and PSN games directly from Home by jumping into an online multiplayer session of MotorStorm. Sony presenters Jack Tretton (SCEA president and CEO) and Kaz Hirai were also shown as Home avatars, and provided a little comedy. Tretton came across Hirai playing his PSP on Tretton's Home deck. "Hey Kaz, what the heck are you doing here?" asked Tretton. "Are you playing Riiidge Raacerrr?!"



The picture next to Harrison's Home avatar is one he took from the E3 stage on his mobile phone and imported into his Home space



■ Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots



■ Uncharted: Drake's Fortune



INTERVIEW

PETER DILLE

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, SONY

the 60GB are sold out – we'll deal with it at that point. But we've not made any further announcements on hardware strategies going beyond that point. [ed. – Sony's president Kaz Hirai has confirmed a phase out of the 60GB model]

Given your current rate of sale, do you have any projections as to how long you will have 60GB models in stock?

No. I think what we're seeing right now is a very elastic response. We dropped the price by \$100 and we've seen an increase of 35 percent across the board. So, that bodes well. But let's take a step back. We're still in July. We're not in the peak selling season and we don't have games like Warhawk and Lair and Heavenly Sword and Uncharted hitting the market. I think we'll see a higher rate of sale, which stands to reason, as it's a seasonal business. But even with that we're confident that we've got ample supply of the 60GB for this fall season.

Given the resources that you're putting into triple-A PlayStation Network games like LittleBigPlanet, are you going to be better about scheduling and promoting these games than Xbox Live Arcade? Some people complain that XBLA games come out erratically and there are often dead periods without much new content.

Well, I don't want to comment on what Live has delivered and what their schedule is. But we've said that we have over 80 games coming and have many teams dedicated to delivering content that's

optimized for PlayStation 3 and available for download. When you look at that breadth of content just from our first-party studios alone, I think gamers are in for a real treat with a lot of great content. And disparate types of content. We're talking about add-on packs to things like Resistance, which is a great first-person shooter, to games like Echochrome, which couldn't be more different, to casual games like bowling using the Sixaxis controller to play a very different type of game altogether. The difference in our strategy and our competitor's is that these games are developed specifically for download to PlayStation 3. Number one, all PlayStation 3's have a hard drive so we don't have to worry about that. Someone can make something as big or small as they want. There's no constraint at the design stage for them. Secondly, these guys are focused on Cell and Blu-ray and, in many cases, these games are in 1080p. That's something that our competition can't do. My understanding is that a lot of the Xbox Arcade games are catalog games and classic games that have been dusted off. There's a place for that, but gamers aren't getting the new experiences they're seeing on PlayStation 3.

On PlayStation Network, when third-party developers make a game for download, can they make it free? Who dictates the pricing?

The third party does. If they came to us and said they wanted it to be free, that's their call. We don't dictate any prices, it's their call completely.

Some people were expecting an announcement on rumble technology for the Sixaxis at E3, especially in light of the new deal with Immersion. Can you talk about where that's at right now?

We did get a lot of questions about that at E3, and what we've said is that, with the Immersion settlement behind us, the companies are talking again. But, there are no announcements at this time.

Most people have speculated that you'd have to buy another controller to get rumble, because the technology wouldn't be transferable to the current Sixaxis. Is that correct?

As I said, there really no announcements that we're making with regards to rumble or future controller announcements. You'd have to characterize all that discussion as speculation and rumor, and as a policy we don't comment on those types of things.

At the press conference you talked about exclusive NCsoft and Epic deals. In a previous interview, Jack Tretton told us that you don't buy exclusives like Microsoft has done with BioWare. With these deals, had that thinking changed?

Jack's comment was that we don't have to buy them; we're offering a platform that allows developers to create the type of content that they can imagine, with great technology doing it, with Blu-ray and Cell – there's games that can't be done on competitive platforms. So, if you want to benefit from the hardware install base that PlayStation has already delivered, this is a great place for you. But, beyond that, I think what the NCsoft deal points out is that there were concerns that they have about how they wanted to approach the market, how they wanted to host the content and deliver the experience, and manage that process. I'd be a little reluctant to speak on their behalf, but I think if you asked them I think they'd go on record as saying that they weren't able to figure out a way to work with Microsoft. They were very excited about working with us, and that resulted in us working on our platform. That's a very different approach than driving up a Brink's truck and buying an exclusive title. I think that's what Jack meant. There's different ways to partner with people and approach them openly in a mutually beneficial way.

On one particular exclusive deal, Microsoft has the episodic content for Grand Theft Auto IV. Was there an opportunity for you to do a similar deal and, if so, do you regret not having signed it?

Our approach to Grand Theft Auto was that it was a great franchise, it has been a great franchise, and it will continue to be a great franchise. We're excited about it coming out on PlayStation 3. Having said that, each platform generation has new IP that comes out and dominates. You go back to Crash Bandicoot and Lara Croft on PSone, and then GTA on PS2. Our approach is that there might be a new way to launch new IP. What we've talked to Take 2 about is the possibility of a new franchise that would be exclusive to PlayStation 3. That's something we haven't talked a lot about but it's something that you'll start hearing a lot about soon. So, again, we don't feel like we're walking away from anything – we've still got Grand Theft Auto on our platform. The many, many millions of Grand Theft Auto fans are largely PlayStation enthusiasts because they played the game on PlayStation first. We believe that those folks will migrate to PlayStation 3, many of them. While all that's going on we'll be working with Take 2 and Rockstar on a new IP. We think that's a great solution for us going forward as well.

I think third parties understand full well the momentum that PlayStation has.

There's the perception that the Xbox 360, because it had a head start over Sony and Nintendo, is considered the first-priority console for third-party software, even if those games might appear on the PS3 as well. How do you combat that perception?

I think that's a false perception, if it is even a perception that's out there. If it's a perception with the media, I can tell you that I don't believe it's a perception with third parties. I think third parties understand full well the momentum that PlayStation has. They believe in our platform historically and they're on board going forward. I think if you look at the rate of sale for 360 right now, they've been having some problems. You're seeing a decrease month-on-month for some of their sell-through for 360 versus a ramp-up in PS3. So, having said that, the software that's coming out this year has been in development for some time and people aren't changing their plans yet. I think, if anything, people will be shifting even more support behind PS3 based on that momentum.

Some people are disappointed that the price drop wasn't really technically a price drop, since once the 60GB SKU is gone from retail there will only be the one price point. What's your reaction to those complaints?

Well, let's try to boil this down in a simple way: If something used to cost \$600 and now it costs \$500, I think that's a price drop. In fact, I think it's a price drop of \$100.

But once the 60GB is out of stock, you're back to having to pay \$600.

What we've said is that there's ample supply of the 60GB. There's been some stuff coming out about our manufacturing plans, but the people that are making these comments aren't necessarily privy to what we have already manufactured. What I can tell you is that we have ample supply of the 60GB model. If people want to buy one for \$499, we're ready to sell them one. Then, what we've said is that – once

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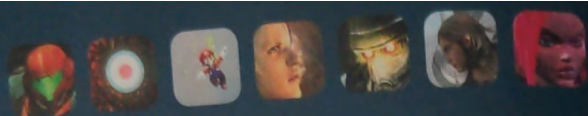
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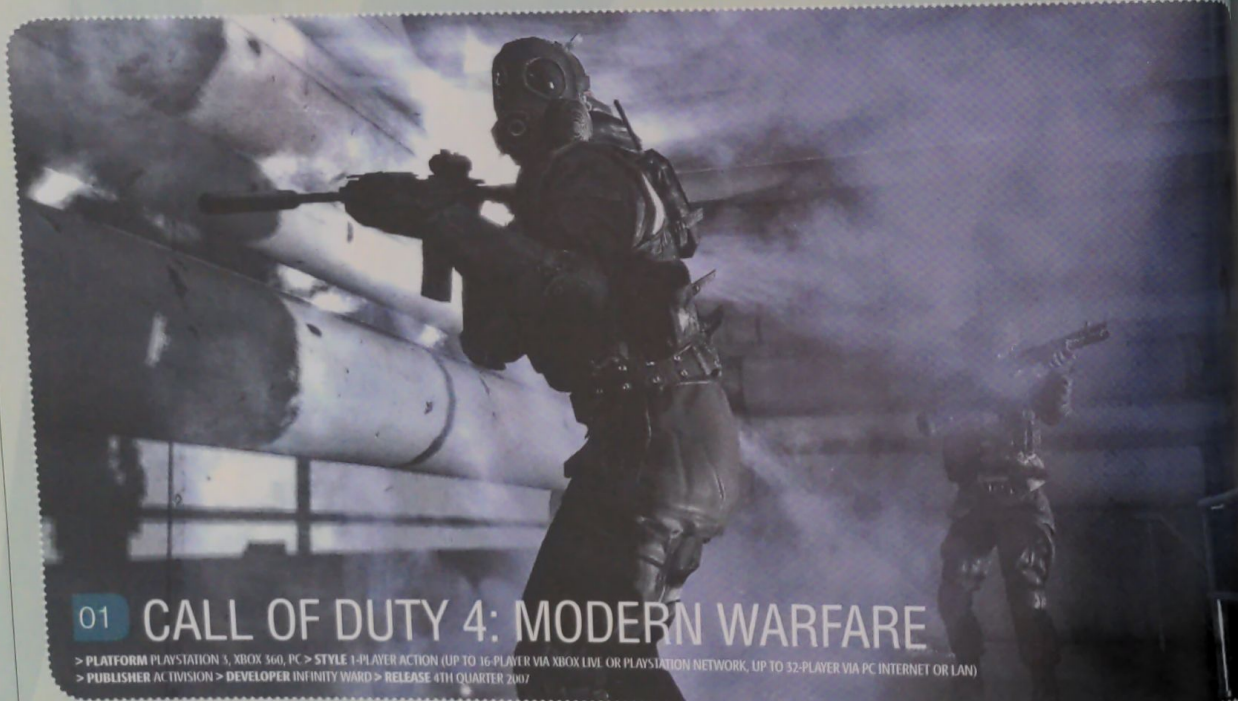
CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Game experience may change during online play.



THE TOP 50 GAMES OF E3

Even though this year's E3 saw some drastic changes in format, it didn't shift its focus from the games. There may have been fewer mind-blowing announcements, but it is impossible to deny that the titles on display still gave gamers a lot to look forward to in the coming months. Even with so many high-quality games on the horizon, sifting through every first-person shooter and quirky side-scroller is a daunting task. That's why we've compiled our picks for the top 50 hottest things at the show, answering the burning questions about the big games. Read on if you want to know what got people talking and why.



01 CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PLAYSTATION NETWORK, UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET OR LAN)
> PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER INFINITY WARD > RELEASE 4TH QUARTER 2007

What It Is » Infinity Ward, the developer behind Call of Duty 1 and 2, is back at it bringing us a chilling vision of Modern Warfare. With locations all over the globe and intense firefights that will leave your jaw on the floor, there is little doubt that this game will offer a powerful, if slightly linear, first-person experience.

Why It's Hot » Each and every level of this game is frighteningly explosive, from the array of armaments to the heart-pumping soundtrack. This game puts you in the fight unlike any before. Not only is this it graphically astounding, its play is frantic with masterfully designed levels.

How It Stacks Up » In a year with Halo 3 and Grand Theft Auto 4, it's hard to believe that Call of Duty 4 is the talk of the town coming out of this year's E3, but playing and seeing is believing. If Infinity Ward can deliver a dominant multiplayer experience, this game may have no match.

02 HALO 3

> PLATFORM XBOX 360 > STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT > DEVELOPER BUNGIE
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 25

What It Is » The final installment of Bungie's masterful FPS promises to resolve all the big questions left behind from the second part's cliffhanger ending. Huge-scale conflicts are the order of the day, and the visuals have come a long way from the recent multiplayer beta.

Why It's Hot » Having the Master Chief and the Arbiter fight side by side ought to be reason enough to sign back up for another tour of duty, but the amazing flexibility of the game film-saving function will let you relive the action again and again.

How It Stacks Up » After seeing an extended demo of the single-player campaign, Bungie's baby still has it where it counts. In the FPS category it will be hard to beat, but this year MC must pull out some big surprises to stand up to the competition's modern weapons of warfare.



03 ROCK BAND

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER MTV GAMES/ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER HARMONIX
> RELEASE HOLIDAY

What It Is » Guitar Hero was only the beginning. Rock Band brings Harmonix full circle with vocals, drums, guitar, and bass. This might be the closest you ever get to living out your Bon Jovi fantasies — groupies not included.

Why It's Hot » It's all about the online this time, whether it's you playing four-player with buddies all across the country or piling up the hundreds of songs that will show up as downloadable content in the first year, including full album collections from the likes of Metallica and The Who.

How It Stacks Up » If this isn't the definitive party game of 2008, we'll eat our plastic toy guitars. The full band experience is amazing, but it's possible that the guitar lines took a hit in the process. Our early demos had Guitar Hero 3 emerging as the choice for the solo shredder. Meanwhile, the Rock Band drums, like Obi-Wan, are more powerful than you can possibly imagine.

04 MASS EFFECT

> PLATFORM XBOX 360 > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER BIOWARE > RELEASE NOVEMBER

What It Is » Imagine what would happen if one of the most highly acclaimed RPG houses implemented Gears of War-like combat into a game that spanned the entire universe. That's exactly what BioWare has done with Mass Effect.

Why It's Hot » Battles usually unfold with the player using the roadie run to reach cover, then blindly firing over the top at a group of robotic adversaries. If that fails, a powerful Force-like push is in order.

How It Stacks Up » The good people at BioWare know exactly what nerds want. Who in their right mind can turn down science fiction, big guns, gorgeous graphics, and loads of customization?



05 LITTLEBIGPLANET

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3 > STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK)
> PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER MEDIA MOLECULE > RELEASE Q1 2008

What It Is » LittleBigPlanet is basically a do-it-yourself platformer. Gamers can use in-game tools to create objects, and the onscreen character interacts with them to get around obstacles. Realistic physics allow objects to behave believably according to their size and composition.

Why It's Hot » On first glance, the visuals and humor are what will catch your eye, but the game backs up the charm with clever gameplay. It provides a high level of freedom through the vast array of creation options, and will focus on sharing and ranking the users' custom content.

How It Stacks Up » If this is the kind of original, imaginative offerings gamers can look forward to on the PlayStation Network, it makes Xbox Live Arcade titles look pretty primitive by comparison. Even in the face of Killzone 2 and Metal Gear Solid 4, this was the PS3 exclusive everyone was talking about at E3.



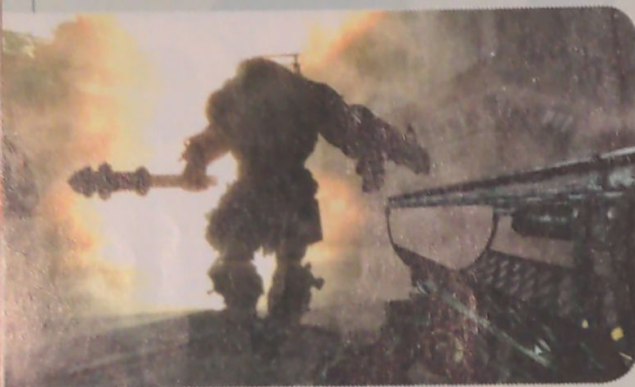
06 KILLZONE 2

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** GUERRILLA GAMES
> **RELEASE** 2008

What It Is « The long-promised shooter for the PS3 is finally revealed, this time with real, honest-to-goodness gameplay. A gritty sci-fi universe now has the good guys on the offensive, fighting back against the hellish Helghast.

Why It's Hot « While the team didn't come out and shout "I told you so!" they may as well have, since their live gameplay demo at Sony's press conference was almost as exciting as that original not-so-real trailer from a few years ago.

How It Stacks Up « Incredible action and intricately detailed visuals are no problem for this huge PS3 exclusive, and the FPS controls are some of the best we've felt with a Sony controller. There were other shooters that outshone Killzone 2 at the show, but then again, Killzone 2 is a lot further away from release than some. Give it a few months and it could give the other big guys an even fight.



07 FALLOUT 3

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWARES > **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL 2008

What It Is « This total re-imagining of the classic Fallout franchise couldn't be in better hands than the folks at Bethesda, who seem committed to walking the fine line between maintaining the themes and tone of the original games while pushing gameplay forward in new directions.

Why It's Hot « Huge branching story paths will mean numerous replays, but the idea of the makers of Oblivion diving into the Fallout universe is a dream come true for most RPG players.

How It Stacks Up « Bethesda won't be releasing Fallout 3 until fall of 2008, and already the game outshone most titles on display at this year's E3. While some other big story-driven games might have stolen our attention for this year, our money is on this game as the RPG to beat in 2008.



08 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 16

What It Is « As one of the most anticipated games of all time, there's a lot of pressure on Rockstar North to deliver a next-gen experience that backs up the hype. Having seen a lengthy demo of the game in action, we can safely say that this next installment is packing a lot of firepower in its gameplay, and its design is taking players to places and thrills that they never could have seen coming.

Why It's Hot « This series' amazing sense of freedom is now backed by realism. You can't simply hop into a car and drive off. You'll now have to break its window and spend a few seconds hotwiring it. Adding that layer to the mix only expands this game's ability to create never-before-seen scenarios.

How It Stacks Up « Rockstar North hasn't gone back and completely reinvented the wheel. This developer has just added new layers and textures that will make the experience feel much different.

09 SUPER MARIO GALAXY

> **PLATFORM** WII > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 12

What It Is « Nintendo's mascot is back, and he's ready to explore the galaxy, bounce from planet to planet, and perform space acrobatics like never before.

Why It's Hot « We only get one of these Mario titles every five years or so, so you know Nintendo is making sure it's flagship series is the best it can be.

How It Stacks Up « Considering Mario is usually known for defining how platform games control, it will be interesting to see what he has to teach us about the Wii's motion controls.



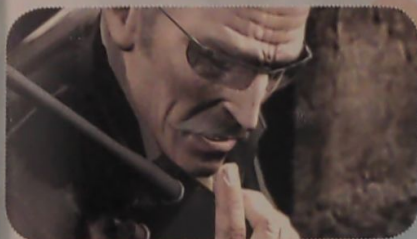
10 ASSASSIN'S CREED

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

What It Is « Tour the ancient holy lands of the Third Crusade as a sword-and-dagger-toting killer who is far more than he appears. Climb walls, leap between rooftops, and meld into the crowd in a refreshing take on the open world concept.

Why It's Hot « The makers of Prince of Persia have incorporated so many new ideas into this game it's hard to know where to start, from a manionette-style control scheme to the remarkable animations apparent in movement and combat. There's also a pretty huge surprise about what is really happening in the story, but we wouldn't dare spoil it for you.

How It Stacks Up « It's hard to argue that any other game this year will innovate in as many ways as Assassin's Creed. With that said, the team has some work ahead to smooth out some rough edges before the planned holiday release.



12 METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** Q1 2008

What It Is « Guns of the Patriots is the final installment in the Metal Gear Solid series, and promises to answer all of the big questions. It is also supposedly the last Metal Gear project from Hideo Kojima, but we've heard that before.

Why It's Hot « Stunning graphics and exciting cinematics make MGS 4 the feather in Sony's PS3 exclusive cap. Oh, and Snake might die.

How It Stacks Up « The trailer at E3 was awesome, and the gameplay we've seen looks like a great evolution for the franchise.

13 GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, WII, PLAYSTATION 2 > **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** RED OCTANE/ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT (XBOX 360, PS3), VICARIOUS VISIONS (WII), BUCCAT (PS2) > **RELEASE** FALL

What It Is « This follow-up in the wildly popular Guitar Hero series delivers one amazing list of tracks, with most being master tracks from the original artists. Red Octane even so far as to sign on Slash (of Guns N' Roses fame, duh!) for a head-to-head boss battle against the guitar legend. He will also be contributing an original track.

Why It's Hot « We played this one for hours at E3 and we couldn't help but be impressed with all the work Neversoft has done to make sure Guitar Hero 3 more than delivers this fall. When asked about a Metallica appearance the team couldn't talk, but they did mention it sure would be great if they could get "one" really good track. You know, ONE.

How It Stacks Up « Sure, Rock Band announced tons of tracks and a full band, but for the Guitar Hero fanatic this new edition delivered the best tracks at the show, and more importantly, tracks that were fun and challenging to play. Guitar Hero masters and amateurs alike will find plenty to love here.



14 RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 2

What It Is « Insomniac's brand of wacky gun-toting platforming, with a splash of RPG flair, is in full swing for this fifth entry in the Ratchet series.

Why It's Hot « From being able to turn enemies into top hat-wearing penguins to forcing robots to dance to a funky beat, Ratchet's weapon list has always been the series' highlight and Future doesn't look to disappoint.

How It Stacks Up « There was some talk at the show about how Future didn't look very innovative compared to previous entries, but when you are talking about a no-miss series from one of the industry's top developers, can you really complain?

11 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

> **PLATFORM** NINTENDO DS > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR NINTENDO WII-FI CONNECTION) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER



What It Is « Though technically a sequel to Wind Waker, Phantom Hourglass is a classic top-down Zelda for the DS in the tradition of A Link to the Past.

Why It's Hot « People get excited for Zelda no matter what, but this one will use the DS to its fullest; movement is handled exclusively by the touch screen, and you blow in the mic to extinguish fires.

How It Stacks Up « Our concerns about the control scheme melted away after some hands-on time, but it is strange that there are no options allowing use of the d-pad controls.

15 SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

> **PLATFORM** WII > **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** HAL LABORATORY INC. > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 3

What It Is « The definitive video game combination of Nintendo's best characters in a four-player throwdown.

Why It's Hot « Smash Bros. is like the ultimate collection of awesome. If it were a movie, it'd be a Godfather remake set in the Star Wars universe starring Spider-Man and the Terminator.

How It Stacks Up « The only disappointment about this game is that there was very little new information available at the show. We do finally have a release date, but December 3rd feels like such a long way away.



16 RESIDENT EVIL 5

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 2008

What It Is » Former S.T.A.R.S. member Chris Redfield returns 10 years after the events of Raccoon City to combat a group of speedy (think *28 Days Later*) zombie-like creatures in some kind of Haitian or African village.

Why It's Hot » It's impressive when the only thing shown for a game is a 60-second clip featuring no story details, a mysterious setting, and undiscovered game mechanics, and it's still talked about as one of the best things at the show. Hot? RE 5 will melt glaciers.

How It Stacks Up » Producer Jun Takeuchi has stated that adjusting your eyes to see in any environment will be an important element in the game.



Resident Evil 5



Halo Wars

17 HALO WARS

> PLATFORM XBOX 360 > STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER ENSEMBLE STUDIOS > RELEASE 2008

What It Is » A graphically impressive Halo real-time strategy offering from the studio that created Age of Empires.

Why It's Hot » Did you read the above bullet? This is a perfect storm, provided Ensemble can nail the control scheme – and early indications are that it's on the right track.

How It Stacks Up » What we saw implied that Halo Wars hews very closely to traditional RTS design, but it's absolutely gorgeous and it's got the Halo fiction behind it.



Unreal Tournament III



StarCraft II

18 UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, PC (XBOX 360 IN 2008) > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES > RELEASE LATE 2007

What It Is » Before there was Gears of War, there was Unreal Tournament – one of the greatest multiplayer games to ever grace the PC.

Why It's Hot » There isn't a faster multiplayer game out there, and with all the technical know-how at Epic, this game is turning Gears of War level graphics in massive multiplayer arenas. Featuring a single-player campaign and an all-new multiplayer mode in Warfare, gamers are guaranteed endless hours of non-stop action.

How It Stacks Up » Nobody does weapons and vehicles quite like Epic Games, and the arsenal for Unreal Tournament III is second to none. For the first time ever, the PlayStation 3 edition will be compatible with the user-developed mods created by the PC community using the award-winning Unreal Engine Toolset.



Metroid Prime 3: Corruption



Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

19 STARCRAFT II

> PLATFORM PC > STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE TBA

What It Is » The successor to the most famous real-time strategy game of all time.

Why It's Hot » StarCraft II looks to maintain the flavor and playstyle of the original, but also add a bunch of fancy new tech and exciting new units.

How It Stacks Up » It's Blizzard. It's StarCraft. Unless an earthquake sends the developer, along with half of California, into the hungry ocean, this is going to be huge.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

20 METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION

> PLATFORM Wii > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER RETRO STUDIOS INC. > RELEASE AUGUST 27

What It Is » Corruption isn't just a first-person shooter; it's also an action, adventure, and platform game. Developer Retro Studios has honed its craft with two previous Prime games, and it doesn't look like it'll drop the ball the third time.

Why It's Hot » With graphics that belong on one of the other next-gen consoles and controls perfectly tweaked for the Wii, we can't think of a better way to finish the summer off.

How It Stacks Up » Nintendo claims that this could be the first-person experience of the year. In a year with COD 4 and Halo 3 that's a pretty bold claim, but after what we've seen we're not discounting it yet.

21 GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

> PLATFORM PSP > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER READY AT DAWN > RELEASE NOVEMBER

What It Is » This PSP prequel leads players on an adventure with Kratos in a period prior to the first God of War titles.

Why It's Hot » It's got flailing blades, mythological beasts, and more chilling backstory about the Ghost of Sparta.

How It Stacks Up » Chains of Olympus could pass for a PS2 title. In terms of visuals and gameplay, it seems like very little is being lost in transition to handheld.



God of War: Chains of Olympus

22 BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER GEARBOX SOFTWARE > RELEASE TBA

What It Is » The first next-gen entry in the WWII tactical shooter series, which takes great advantage of the power of the newer machines.

Why It's Hot » Extensive environmental destruction lets you shape the battlefield, and the series' hallmark strategic gameplay is in full effect.

How It Stacks Up » With more story than Ghost Recon and more strategy than Crysis, this is a hugely promising title.

23 STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER LUCASARTS > RELEASE 2008

What It Is » This game looks to deliver the Jedi-tastic experience Star Wars fans have been waiting for.

Why It's Hot » In the trailer, Vader's apprentice Force pulls a Star Destroyer out of the sky and crashes it into a city. As the gargantuan vessel slides toward him, he pulls out his red saber.

How It Stacks Up » If the trailer sizes up the gameplay, not even the combined might of Kratos and Dante would be able to take down this fleshy machine of destruction.

24 BURNOUT PARADISE

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER CRITERION GAMES > RELEASE JANUARY 2008

What It Is » If the Burnout series is about anything other than racing, it's about wrecking, and with Paradise – the first Burnout developed exclusively for next-gen – the crashes look better than ever.

Why It's Hot » Welcome to Paradise City, Burnout's hub world. You won't be picking challenges from a list; driving to your next race is half the game's fun.

How It Stacks Up » The lack of a Crash Mode has us a little worried, but Criterion is convinced that Showtime Mode will fill that gap.



Burnout Paradise

25 ECHOCHROME

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, PSP > STYLE 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER SCEI > RELEASE TBA

What It Is » If M.C. Escher had born in the video game generation, this might have been the culmination of his life's work. Echochrome's simplistic graphics hide the incredibly unique gameplay, which has you navigating seemingly impossible puzzles by rotating the camera to hide the obstacles in your path.

Why It's Hot » When a white screen with some black lines is able to gamer more buzz than most triple-A console retail announcements, you know it's something special.

How It Stacks Up » It's completely different from anything else you've seen from a game, but exactly how it works remains a mystery – there was little more than a short video at this year's show.

26 LOST ODYSSEY

> PLATFORM XBOX 360 > STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER MISTWALKER/FEEL PLUS > RELEASE WINTER

What It Is » Lost Odyssey is a traditional RPG featuring turn-based battles and an immortal 1,000-year-old protagonist named Kaim.

Why It's Hot » It will be the second title to come from Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's Mistwalker studio.

How It Stacks Up » It lacks the visual flair of Blue Dragon and Eternal Sonata, but makes up for it with a more thematically sophisticated plot.

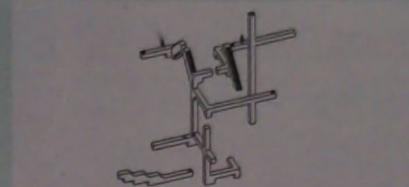
27 CRYSIS

> PLATFORM PC > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER CRYTEK > RELEASE 4TH QUARTER 2007

What It Is » One of the best-looking FPSs we've ever seen. Crysis tasks players with fending off an alien invasion through lush jungles, frozen landscapes, and into the invading ships themselves.

Why It's Hot » Aside from the graphics, the powers – armor, super-speed, super-strength – that your super-suit grants you are a blast to use.

How It Stacks Up » The visuals outclass pretty much everything, and the gameplay looks promising. We have some worries about the null-G sections, though.



Echochrome



Lost Odyssey



Crysis



Mario Kart Wii



Contra 4



Enemy Territories: Quake Wars

28 MARIO KART Wii [WORKING TITLE]

> PLATFORM Wii > STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (ONLINE TBA) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE TBA

What It Is » More Mario Kart – this time on Wii, with the motion-sensing control that implies. Based on the trailer, a mixture of both old and new tracks will be present again in this version.

Why It's Hot » Because Mario Kart rules. It may look like a GameCube game, but Nintendo has never disappointed with this series.

How It Stacks Up » We haven't played it yet, but the franchise's outstanding track record buys it a free pass for now.

29 HEAVENLY SWORD

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3 > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER NINJA THEORY > RELEASE SEPTEMBER

What It Is » By cutting through bad guys with blade that is slowly draining her life, the fiery-haired Nanko avenges in style.

Why It's Hot » The swirling blades and animations look great, and characters' nuanced facial expressions add life to the dialogue.

How It Stacks Up » The combat feels more deliberate than your average action title, falling somewhere between God of War and Devil May Cry.



Heavenly Sword

30 CONTRA 4

> PLATFORM NINTENDO DS > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER WAYFARER TECHNOLOGIES > RELEASE WINTER 2007

What It Is » Contra returns to its roots for its 20th anniversary with a 2D side-scrolling shooter on the Nintendo DS.

Why It's Hot » Offer large-scale platforming via the two screens, mix in a little co-op, and combine it with new weapon combos and a Bionic Commando-like grapple ability. What do you get? Probably a retro gaming rush.

How It Stacks Up » Contra 4 may not use any touch-screen technology, but like its 8-bit compatriots Super Mario and Castlevania, a return to its side-scrolling past could yield big sales and happy gamers.

31 ENEMY TERRITORIES: QUAKE WARS

> PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER SPLASH DANCE/ID SOFTWARE, ACTIVISION FORTRESS CITY (PLAYSTATION 3), NERVE SOFTWARE (XBOX 360) > RELEASE TBA

What It Is » A Battlefield 1942-esque strategic multiplayer FPS set during the Stragg's first invasion of Earth.

Why It's Hot » Past the tight FPS gameplay, the ability to build and utilize a variety of vehicles and structures adds a new layer to this shooter.

How It Stacks Up » It's pretty, and it's already fun, but the strategic considerations are going to have to rock large to make this stand out in a crowded field.

32 HELLGATE: LONDON

> **PLATFORM** PC > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER VIA INTERNET)
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI/ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** FLAGSHIP STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** 4TH QUARTER 2007

What It Is » The next game from the creative minds behind Diablo – grind your way to the fattest loot in the land.

Why It's Hot » Awesome online support and an incredible random map/monster/loot generator will keep this dungeon crawler fresh for a very long time.

How It Stacks Up » This streamlined experience offers an alternate path for players uninterested in the complex worlds of World of Warcraft or Tabula Rasa.

33 RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS 2

> **PLATFORM** WII > **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT PARIS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15

What It Is » One of the few genuinely successful third-party games on the Wii returns with more insane Rabbid antics as the hapless hares try to take over Earth.

Why It's Hot » Take the quirky fun of the first game and multiply it with a four-player party mode, customizable Rabbids, and 60 new minigames that poke fun at popular culture and gaming.

How It Stacks Up » Rayman Raving Rabbids proved its mettle last go around, and judging from our brief hands-on time with minigames that mimicked Tecmo Bowl and Guitar Hero, this game should pick up where the last one left off.

34 CIVILIZATION REVOLUTION

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, NINTENDO DS > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS GAMES
> **RELEASE** SPRING

What It Is » Instead of porting the latest PC version of Civilization to the consoles, series creator Sid Meier is reinventing this hallowed game for the console crowd. The result is a game that is still deep in strategy, but in a much different, and more beautiful way.

Why It's Hot » This newly designed Civilization has more of an intimate feel to it, but still retains the series' amazingly complex strategies. Be assured, most battles will still end with a nuke.

How It Stacks Up » Strategy games are a dime a dozen on PC, but really don't have a strong foothold on console. Maybe a great new Civ title can open the floodgates.

35 WARHAWK

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3 > **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** INCOGNITO ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** FALL 2007

What It Is » The PS3's only exclusively multiplayer title features fast-paced air, armored, and infantry combat across huge maps. Picture a futuristic Battlefield hopped up on steroids and stimulants.

Why It's Hot » Waging war on an epic scale is never dull, and Warhawk has all the tools necessary to wage a successful online campaign, including clan support and a ranking system featuring unlockable customization.

How It Stacks Up » Given the lack of solid multiplayer games on the PS3, Warhawk should hit the ground running when it debuts this fall. Download it online or purchase it at a retail store (which will net you a Bluetooth headset as well).

36 DE BLOB

> **PLATFORM** WII > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** BLUE TONGUE > **RELEASE** 2008

What It Is » When an evil corporation takes over and outlaws all color from the world, it's up to the adorable de Blob to bring life back to his city.

Why It's Hot » Players will be able to mix different colors and then bounce across buildings and create music in the process.

How It Stacks Up » We're happy to see people putting some effort into developing unique Wii titles that have good controls. With its unique art style and puzzle-oriented gameplay, de Blob could appeal to fans of Katamari Damacy.

37 FABLE 2

> **PLATFORM** XBOX 360 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBD)
> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** LIONHEAD STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 2008

What It Is » If you thought that the original Fable was wildly inventive, just wait until you see what Peter Molyneux has planned for the sequel. With a canine companion at your side, your sword doubles as a conductor's baton, and no matter how thoroughly you get beaten, you'll likely never die.

Why It's Hot » Molyneux is always looking for ways to innovate, and from the little we've seen thus far, Fable 2 is already showing a new approach to combat with its rhythm-based mechanics, and also death in video games, which is being replaced with cosmetic scaring on the character.

How It Stacks Up » Of all of the games shown at this year's show, Fable 2 really can't be connected to any other game, simply because it is moving in directions that no other game has gone before.

38 SOULCALIBUR IV

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (ONLINE TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI > **RELEASE** 2008

What It Is » A continuation of the long-running fighting franchise, with a beefed up character creator and luscious visuals.

Why It's Hot » The addition of online play and a few balance tweaks are more than enough to have us anxious to get our hands on this.

How It Stacks Up » This is the fighting game to watch for everyone besides the "Virtua Fighter is so much better than anything else" crowd.

39 INFAMOUS

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SUCKER PUNCH
> **RELEASE** 2008

What It Is » Following the same path as Naughty Dog, Sucker Punch, the developer of Sly Cooper, is taking a stab at a more realistic, action-focused game.

Why It's Hot » You may look like an average Joe, but you actually have super powers, and it sounds like you can use them for either evil (throwing cars and electrocuting people), or good (activities that bring about the response: meh).

How It Stacks Up » This may seem like a unique game, but it actually sounds just like Prototype (see last month's cover story). It'll be interesting to see how both of these open-world super hero games differ in the end.

40 EVERYDAY SHOOTER

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTER > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** QUEASY GAMES > **RELEASE** 2008

What It Is » A collection of shooter games in the vein of Robotron or Geometry Wars, but with some added music game elements.

Why It's Hot » The PC version received some critical acclaim, and now console players will be able to check out the game for themselves when it comes to the PlayStation Network.

How It Stacks Up » Unlike other shooters, Everyday is entrancing and relaxing. Every shot fired creates a musical effect, and each level will require a different approach.



41 THE SIMPSONS GAME

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, WII, PLAYSTATION 2, NINTENDO DS
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** WINTER

What It Is » Four playable family members battle their way through familiar characters and locations in a cel-shaded Springfield.

Why It's Hot » It's a parody game with no direct ties to the film, and is loaded with obscure references to the show and tongue-in-cheek jokes.

How It Stacks Up » The gameplay itself needs some tuning, but the humor and satirical tone are spot on.

42 DEVIL MAY CRY 4

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** WINTER

What It Is » The fourth installment in this stylish action series features a new hero and goes multiplatform for the first time.

Why It's Hot » The Devil Bringer expands the old gun-and-sword formula by adding throws and grabs to your arsenal. Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi was the mind behind Resident Evil 4 and the original DMC.

How It Stacks Up » Controls are more fluid than ever before, but the visuals haven't evolved to the same degree.

43 HAZE

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3 > **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 24-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** FREE RADICAL
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

What It Is » TimeSplitters developer Free Radical's take on a futuristic war fueled by bombastic weaponry and drug-addled soldiers.

Why It's Hot » Haze features four-player co-op throughout the campaign and sees you switching sides in mid-war, giving you the best of both worlds in terms of weaponry. The Nectar drug allows your soldier to go into a killing frenzy upon the push of a button.

How It Stacks Up » The dynamic, non-scripted AI should help Haze stand out from the pack, and making it a PS3 exclusive for the holiday gives it more of a fighting chance than going against Halo 3 on the Xbox 360.

44 PROJECT GOTHAM 4

> **PLATFORM** XBOX 360 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** BIZARRE CREATIONS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

What It Is » If you've driven in a heavy storm before, you know how dangerous it can be. Changing weather is one of the aspects that really makes this next iteration so enticing. We also like the idea of bikes versus cars.

Why It's Hot » Racing fans around E3 could be heard saying, "did you see how the rain rolls off of the car?" This game is a visual knockout, and the variety that the weather and terrain variations add to the gameplay should make it one hell of a ride as well.

How It Stacks Up » With Forza and Gran Turismo cornering the simulation market, Project Gotham has all of the elements needed to pave its own path and steer clear of the traffic jam.

45 TABULA RASA

> **PLATFORM** PC > **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** NCSoft > **DEVELOPER** DESTINATION GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

What It Is » An action-packed sci-fi MMO from Lord British, the creator of Ultima.

Why It's Hot » Living battlefields full of enemies on missions give Tabula Rasa's gameworld an organic feel unrivaled by other MMORPGs.

How It Stacks Up » It's a vastly different design than traditional MMOs, but this has the potential to be something special.

46 WORLD IN CONFLICT

> **PLATFORM** XBOX 360, PC > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (ONLINE TBA VIA XBOX LIVE, UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** TBA (XBOX 360), SEPTEMBER 18 (PC)

What It Is » A beautiful tactical real-time strategy predicated on a modern Cold War breaking out into open conflict.

Why It's Hot » The visuals are unbelievable, and the small-scale RTS gameplay lends itself to intense, intimate battles.

How It Stacks Up » The Ground Control-esque design makes this an odd duck in the RTS space, but we dig its off-beat sensibilities.

47 PATAPON

> **PLATFORM** PSP > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** TBA > **DEVELOPER** SCE STUDIOS JAPAN > **RELEASE** TBA

What It Is » Patapon is an oddball action/platformer that incorporates rhythmic button pressing in the action.

Why It's Hot » Did you like Loco Roco? Then get ready, because Patapon is being handled by the same development team.

How It Stacks Up » We love the game's artistic style: simple shapes and silhouettes. It's basic, but it is implemented very well.

48 FRACTURE

> **PLATFORM** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** DAY 1 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 2008

What It Is » Using weapons that modify terrain to suit their needs, soldiers of the future fight for world supremacy.

Why It's Hot » The thrill of looking over the scarred, deformed battlefield after a heated deathmatch is a sensation gamers won't find anywhere else.

How It Stacks Up » We enjoyed the frantic multiplayer matches we played, but have yet to see if the game can maintain the intensity in single-player.

49 THRILLVILLE: OFF THE RAILS

> **PLATFORM** XBOX 360, WII, PLAYSTATION 2, NINTENDO DS, PSP > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS (360, WII, PS2, PSP), DC STUDIOS (DS) > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

What It Is » Last year's best-selling original children's intellectual property returns in a big, big way with the introduction of death-defying Whoa Coasters. In this sequel, you have complete customization control over everything, and can compete in 34 minigames.

Why It's Hot » There's something charming about having the ability to build coasters that so outrageous that guests either fly off them or lose their lunches. The multiplayer minigames are also looking quite fun.

How It Stacks Up » There's little else out there that grants players such a high level of customization.

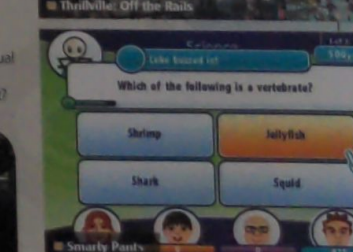
50 SMARTY PANTS

> **PLATFORM** WII > **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA LOS ANGELES/PLANET MOON STUDIOS > **RELEASE** HOLIDAY 2007

What It Is » This quirky trivia game has up to four players wildly swinging their remotes as they raise their hands to answer, spin gameshow-style wheels, and engage in dance-offs and tug-of-wars powered by the Wii-remote.

Why It's Hot » EA wants this to be a family affair, matching the questions you get to your age, so kids and grandmas alike can have fun.

How It Stacks Up » There was plenty on display this year to appeal to casual players, but Smarty Pants stood apart as a game that people who read gaming magazines might actually get a kick out of. Know anyone like that?



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

"SOMETHING MAY BE EXCELLENT AS ITSELF, AND YET BE ULTIMATELY WORTHLESS. A BOWEL MOVEMENT, FOR EXAMPLE."

—Movie critic Roger Ebert responds to horror author Clive Barker on the subject of video games as art

BAD?

Is the industry ratings board ESRB getting too heavy-handed? Fresh off of giving *Manhunt 2* an AO rating, the ESRB has warned a few companies about game content on their websites. Some have old ratings icons or lack of content descriptors, while the ESRB thinks others should have age gates because of the content of their online trailers. Is this a show of force or a serious issue?

UGLY



Congress' Joint Economic Committee is expected to issue a report soon on the issue of taxing virtual goods in MMOs. In *Azeroth*, like in life, death and taxes are inevitable. The former is particularly certain if you are a pink-haired Gnome.

BAD

Splinter Cell: Conviction's Sam Fisher is guilty all right. Guilty of being delayed until March of next year.



UGLY

Too Human developer Silicon Knights is suing Unreal Engine 3 creator and licensor Epic, charging that Epic was late in providing dev kits to Silicon Knights, and that the company also failed to provide support for the engine. Silicon Knights has since had to write its own game engine for the title.



BAD

Mario Party 8 for the Wii has been recalled in the U.K. due to a number of copies featuring the U.S. version of the game that uses the word "spastic." In the U.K. the term is an offensive word referring to someone with a mental or physical disability.



GOOD

Rockstar has announced that the formerly exclusive Xbox 360 title *Table Tennis* will be heading to the Wii in the fall. It's not known yet, however, if the Wii version will be as modestly priced as the 360 release, which initially sold for \$39.99. Both the 360 and Wii will also get a special Scholarship Edition of PS2's *Bully* this winter.

news

THE CIRCLE OF TRUST

XBOX 360 WARRANTY EXTENDED

After two years and who knows how many red rings of death, Microsoft is finally addressing the high failure rate of the Xbox 360. The console manufacturer has changed its warranty for those afflicted by the three flashing red lights, which signifies a general hardware failure. The coverage is now effective for three years past the initial date of purchase. This warranty retroactively applies to all Xbox 360s, with those bought at the launch of the system covered until November of 2008. Microsoft will repair your console for free, and even cover the shipping costs. Also, anyone who has previously paid for repairs related to the red rings error will be reimbursed. Microsoft says that all other existing warranties regarding the system and any other problems—such as overheating, disc scratching, or bricking via updates—not related to the red rings of death are not covered by this new warranty and will stay the same.

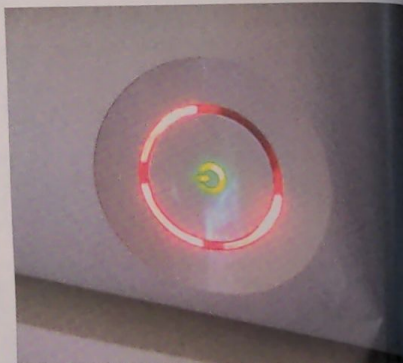
Microsoft expects to take a hit in excess of a billion dollars in order to cover the issue, although it isn't stating how many consoles are thought to be affected. There are some unconfirmed reports that this number may be as high as 33 percent. Consumer electronics are expected to have a failure rate of three to five percent. Furthermore, it is unknown how many units still on store shelves may be faulty. Microsoft says that it has no idea of knowing what this number may be and how many possibly afflicted 360s are in the retail channel, but that it is continually improving the system. The company is not specifically citing what is causing the failure, saying generically in a statement, "...the company conducted extensive investigations into potential sources of general hardware failures... [and] identified a number of factors..."

This is not the first time the warranty for the system has had to be adjusted to deal with this problem. Complaints regarding the 360 surfaced right after its launch in November of 2005, which Microsoft downplayed until it extended the normal 90-day warranty to a full year for its original batch of consoles. The company also paid for those first-year owners who needed to have their systems repaired.

Dean Takahashi from *The San Jose Mercury News* reported before E3 that Microsoft was working on redesigning the internal structure of the 360, codenamed Falcon. It is believed that with smaller chips and processors, the heat generated by the system would be less—perhaps addressing one possible issue that causes the red rings of death.

The console may not be out of the woods just yet, however. Unrelated to the red rings, Jorge Brouwer is seeking more than \$5 million in a class-action lawsuit in Florida because he claims that an inherent flaw in the Xbox 360 scratched his games. Earlier this year, a Dutch TV program even investigated the problem and found that the scratches were created by a fundamental design flaw in the 360 due to insufficient cushioning around the laser—although users themselves can cause problems if they move the system while it's running. Microsoft hasn't denied a disc-scratching issue, but instead told Associated Press that it had not gotten "widespread" reports of that particular problem.

There were also unconfirmed reports that there a recall was put into place by a major retailer in Australia, but it is unknown if this was simply a temporary measure or what other actions the store chain took (including those with Microsoft itself) to help consumers and their possibly ailing consoles. Despite the system's legacy of technical issues, it is doubtful that Microsoft will announce a recall, lion in North America. Perhaps the console's troubles are evidence that Microsoft's decision to put a premium on releasing a year before its rivals hasn't been without a cost.



GI OPINION



Microsoft made the right decision to extend Xbox 360 warranties, and doing what's right didn't come cheap for the Redmond juggernaut. That said, Microsoft still has some explaining to do, because money isn't making the problem disappear. The public deserves more forthright information regarding what exactly is causing the red rings of death and what Microsoft is doing to correct and prevent failures. Is it safe to purchase one of the Xbox 360s on store shelves today without worry of losing your console for a few months due to repair? You deserve to know, and if the answer is no, Microsoft is only halfway home on the road to redemption. —BERTZ

BioShock

BioShock has
GAME OF THE YEAR
material written all over it."

Official Xbox Magazine

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THE WAY
NVIDIA
IT'S MEANT TO BE PLAYED

2K

ESRB MATURE 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

SOUNDS BEST ON
X-Fi
TECHNOLOGY

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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



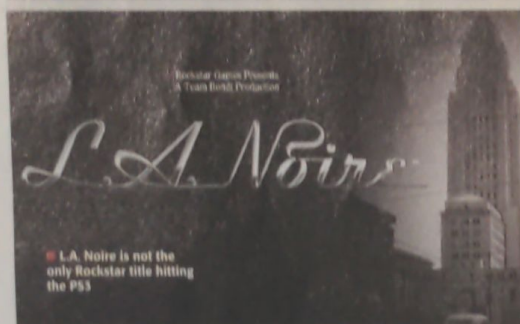
■ The original Saints Row for Xbox 360

SAINTS ROW 2 SOARS?

Maybe it's just a little bit of open-world action game humor, but at THQ's E3 press conference, executive vice president of THQ's worldwide publishing Kelly Flock, was wearing a Saints Row 2 t-shirt with an airplane on it. Is this just a dig at competitor Grand Theft Auto's use of airplanes or is Saints Row 2 taking to the skies?

ANALYSTS EXPECT A "REAL" PS3 PRICE DROP

Last month—before E3—we heard some erroneous information regarding a change in pricing for the PS3. At the show, Sony announced a quasi-price drop whereby the 60GB version would sell for \$300 less until stock runs out. Industry analyst Michael Pachter, however, believes that the new 80GB PS3 will get a real price drop to \$499 once the 60GB sells out. "In our view, the Sony entry level price of \$499 is here to stay," said Pachter.



■ L.A. Noire is not the only Rockstar title hitting the PS3

SONY'S TAKE 2 EXCLUSIVE?

Microsoft has been beating the pavement trumpeting their exclusive Grand Theft Auto IV downloadable content to anyone with ears, while Sony has done nothing to wipe off the egg on its face. But maybe it will. In our interview with Peter Dille, senior vice president of marketing (check it out on page 32), he says that Sony is "working with Take 2 and Rockstar on a new IP." Is this L.A. Noire? No. Sony isn't saying much about the upcoming exclusive, but it did take the time to clarify that it will not be L.A. Noire.

Get some insider info? Email us at connect@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Japanese publisher/developer Koei is well known for constantly knocking out the Dynasty Warriors games, but it did take a break long enough in 2002 to release this title on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube (which was the primary version). The game featured four selectable characters, boss battles, some first-person spells, and, of course, hack 'n' slash combat that could only be inspired by... you guessed it... Dynasty Warriors.

(Clueless on page 30)



news

MOORE MOVES ON FROM MICROSOFT
RETURNS TO HIS SPORTS ROOTS

Where once he brandished his muscles with tattoos of release dates for Halo 3 and Grand Theft Auto IV on the Xbox 360, Peter Moore, Microsoft's former vice president of interactive entertainment business will now be flexing his guns for a different industry giant. After hosting Microsoft's E3 press conference, Moore announced that he was leaving the company "for personal reasons." Later it was revealed that he was heading over to EA Sports, where he'll serve as the president of the division.

During his time with Microsoft, Moore offered a likeable face for the company—particularly at E3, where the tone is set for the rest of the year and other executives such as Robbie Bach and J. Allard gain way to Moore's natural charm. His past stint with Sega as president and COO during the launch of the Dreamcast helped his credibility.

Apart from his personality, Moore's marketing savvy was instrumental in guiding the Xbox brand to where it is today in the hearts and minds of gamers. Moore emphasized consumers' need to emotionally connect with the product. "The big problem at Microsoft," he told CNNMoney.com back in 2005, "is that they always tell you why you need something. For the Xbox 360, you need to feel like you want it. To be cool, in other words, you have to be part of the Xbox gang." It was Moore's decision to ban any technology or game references from the 360's first major TV ad push that featured girls skipping rope and other urban activities that had nothing to do with playing a video game.

Moore's past experience with Reebok (before Sega) should aid him at EA Sports, a workhorse division for publisher Electronic Arts that has performed unevenly so far in the next-gen era. He will also have clockwork releases. One ally now in his corner is former rival Jack Tretton—president and CEO of Sony with him," said Tretton in a statement. "I am sure [EA's success] will continue with Peter now at the helm." Interestingly, Don Mattrick, former EA president, will be replacing Moore at Microsoft as a senior vice president. Earlier this year, Mattrick joined the company as an advisor to its PC and Xbox games divisions. Mattrick was with EA for a combined 23 years after founding Distinctive Software, which became EA Canada. While he brought up series like The Sims and Need for Speed, he also oversaw EA when it received its reputation for churning out sequels.

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DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

360'S HD-DVD PRICE DROP

Perhaps in an attempt to blunt Blu-ray's momentum, Microsoft has dropped the price of its HD-DVD peripheral to \$179. If you buy the add-on before September 1, you can also get five free HD-DVD movies.



NFL STREET GOES LEGIT

EA Big's NFL Street franchise has petered out, but the company is hoping a re-branding on next-gen systems sets it straight. NFL Tour kicks off in January, and tasks gamers with playing alongside NFL players as you battle NFL teams towards getting a pro contract.



PS3 MEDAL OF AIRBORNE GETS DEFERMENT

Usually getting a military deferment would be happy news, but in this case, it's unfortunate. The PS3 version of Medal of Honor: Airborne comes out in November—months after the Xbox 360 version ships out on August 28th.



WARREN SPECTOR GOES GOOFY

Deus Ex creator Warren Spector and his Junction Point Studios have landed a permanent gig—the developer has been acquired by Disney, and will make both original and classic Disney next-gen franchises. This is not quite what Deus Ex fans had hoped.



UBISOFT HANDLES HEROES/ CAMERON'S AVATAR

Ubisoft has partnered with Aliens director James Cameron for a video game based on his film Avatar about an ex-Marine whose mind resides inside an alien body. The company is also handling the action game for NBC's Heroes.

Dean Bodle:
Forza 2 Lead Foot

Game Informer is scouring the leaderboards in search of top gamers to find the best of the best, uncovering the person behind the handle, and learning his or her strategies. So if you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be the next featured gamer.

Handle:
VVV Deano

Age:
16

Hometown:
London, England

Rivals:
D2C Picasso, TTR ShuttleJ, D2C XcamX

Accomplishments:

Number one on 11 out of 25 time trial races on the Forza Motorsport 2 Xbox Live leaderboards. The next closest competitor has six first place slots.

Life Outside of Forza 2:

Bodle likes to play soccer and race go-karts in his free time. In the UK, high schoolers graduate at age 16 instead of 18, so he'll be attending Havering College this fall.

Origin of Skills:

"I've always been a racing fan ever since I started playing games," Bodle says. "My first racing game was Mario Kart on Super Nintendo, but my first proper racing game was Formula 1 on PlayStation. I was pretty much hooked from then on."

Not Necessarily a Mechanic:

"I can't tweak my cars," Bodle admits. "When I try, they just end up being worse."

Favorite Car:

Ferrari #62 Risi Competizione F430GT

Favorite Track:

Sebring Long

Team VVV:

Bodle is part of a video game racing team named after Caesar's famous "Veni, Vidi, Vici" quote. The team is based out of the U.K., and has groups based all over the world, including North America. VVV's website (www.teamVVV.com) boasts over 1,200 forum members.

■ At the time of this printing, Bodle has the fastest times in the world on the following courses:

- Suzuka East
- Road Atlanta Short
- Sebring Short
- Silverstone International
- Mazda Laguna Seca
- Sunset Infield
- Mugello
- Silverstone Grand Prix
- Sebring
- Suzuka
- TT—King Cobra

Practice Time:

Taking true advantage of summer vacation, Bodle plays almost 12 hours of Forza 2 each day. He plans to cut back when school starts up...to just six hours.

No Driver's License?

"I haven't driven a proper road car in real life yet, but I used to own a go-kart," Bodle says. "Hopefully, my racing game experience will make me a better driver in real life."

Opinions on TrueSkill:

"TrueSkill ranking is pretty cool, but I wish they separated ranked matches from unranked matches more," Bodle says. "I like to mess about in some races, which occasionally causes my rank to go down."

Favorite (Non-Forza) Game Franchises:

Project Gotham Racing, Mario Kart, The Legend of Zelda

What Should be in the Next Forza?

"I hope there will be a lot fewer glitches and that players won't be able to lock the setups, as I like to have an even playing field since I can't tune cars." [laughs]



■ Dean Bodle's custom car. We're guessing an Xbox 360 isn't the only console he owns.

FLY THE GREATEST AIRCRAFT YOU NEVER KNEW EXISTED!

BLAZING
ANGELS 2

SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII



ALL NEW
CO-OP AND
MULTIPLAYER
MODES



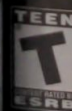
Pilot over 50 authentic planes and prototypes in some of the world's most exotic locations.



Engage in 18 high-stakes missions where you'll bomb bridges, steal secret weapons, and more.



Go up against a giant German zeppelin over the pyramids of Cairo.



Mild Language
Violence



PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360 LIVE



UBISOFT

SHOULD GAMES HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE AO?

The video game industry is faced with a number of difficult questions and many ways to look at them. In Game Informer's debate section, we attempt to analyze these scenarios from different angles. Like a typical debate club, our editors have been assigned to defend a position whether or not it agrees with their personal views. In this edition, we take a closer look at the ESRB's AO rating and the viability of restrictions that come along with it.



PRO

AO GAMES HAVE JUST AS MUCH OF A RIGHT to exist as unrated DVDs, parental advisory CDs, and mature comics. Unfortunately, Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft all have policies in place to prevent any game that receives an AO rating from reaching their consoles. On top of that hurdle, major

retailers like Target and Wal-Mart refuse to carry any AO games. Talk about your double standards. Sony and Microsoft consoles both offer DVD playback that anyone could use to watch everything from extreme violence to hardcore pornography, but this is wisely tempered by parental controls for both films and games. So why do these companies give adults the choice to allow or block NC-17 films, while at the same time barring adults from playing AO games? The Wii's web browser allows unbridled access to the seedy side of the Internet, so Nintendo isn't getting off on this point either. Retailers want to look responsible by denying AO games. So why do they carry unrated versions of movies like *American Pie* or parental advisory CDs from Nine Inch Nails? With all of these restrictions in place, the ESRB isn't using the AO rating to inform parents – it's simply banning games. The MPAA may be able to hurt a movie's chance of appearing in theaters with an NC-17, but at least these filmmakers can connect with their audience in the DVD market with its healthy 81.2 percent penetration rate¹ and full retail support. Sure, game companies are free to release an AO game via digital download on PC, but that's a limited market with only 55 percent of Americans having access to broadband internet² and vastly fewer actively downloading games. After all, how many times have you downloaded a full-blown PC game versus buying it on a disc? Video game makers and adult consumers deserve the right to distribute and play games the way the original artists intended with the same ease of access to the appropriate audience that all other games enjoy. The ESRB, hardware manufacturers, and retailers have no right to decide for a grown gamer what kind of content he or she is mature enough to handle. —BRYAN

1) 81.2 percent of Americans own a DVD player as of Q3 2006 according to Nielsen reports 2) 55 percent of American adults have broadband Internet access according to Pew Internet research



CON

THE KISS OF DEATH that is the AO rating exists for a reason. Retailers didn't decide not to carry AO games by flipping a coin, and hardware manufacturers haven't withheld licensing for AO titles out of whimsy. As much as the "games are art" types don't want to hear it, there are sound financial reasons for these behaviors. Nintendo doesn't want its family-friendly brand names tarnished by association with ultra-violent, edgy content. Big-box stores like Best Buy have a vested interest in retaining their Middle American appeal. There are massive amounts of money invested in brand names, brick-and-mortar storefronts, and hardware platforms, and those corporations have every right to maximize the value of their assets as best they can. The government has no business stepping in and forcing decisions on any of these companies without clear evidence that the public good is at stake. In this case, forcing the distribution of adult content like *Manhunt 2* serves no such purpose. ESRB ratings aren't legally binding – publishers have every right to release whatever they like for open platforms like Windows, Linux, or Flash Player over their own website or a download service like GamersGate. There are free, open channels available for the release of artistic works. If this debate is honestly about the art of video games and not garnering mainstream consumer exposure, let the publishers use alternate distribution methods rather than try to coerce Wal-Mart and Microsoft to help them sell their product. I suspect that we'll find that this is not the case, and that Take-Two and every other publisher kowtows to the bottom line as much as Target Corp. Economically, the marketplace has evolved a set of rules about what it will bear because of clear real-world factors; arbitrarily forcing changes to those rules is a fool's game. Politically, the right to express yourself is guaranteed by the Constitution. The right to express yourself on technology developed by other people at great cost is not. —ADAM

THE OFFICIAL EXPANSION PACK OF MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR



27 NEW MAPS. 110 NEW UNITS. 13 NEW FACTIONS.
FOUR NEW CAMPAIGNS TO CONQUER.

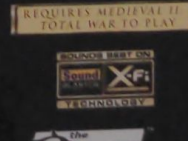
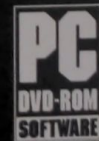
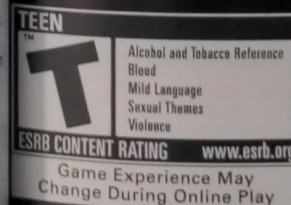


TAKE CONTROL OF LEGENDARY HISTORICAL
HEROES TO BOOST TROOP MORALE AND POWER.

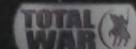


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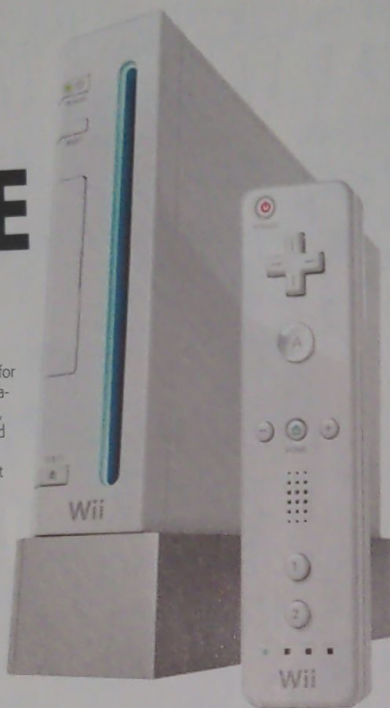
www.totalwar.com

Wii GOES SMALL TIME

NINTENDO OPENS Wii TO INDIE DEVELOPERS

Last console generation, Nintendo all but laughed at its competitors for crafting online strategies, but now the company is rolling out the features like it means business. Nintendo has just announced WiWare, a service similar to Xbox Live Arcade that allows developers to create and sell their creations as downloads through the Wii Shop channel for Wii Points. Nintendo says there will be a "variety of pricing options," and that the first fruits of this endeavor are expected early next year.

No partners have been officially announced, and it will be interesting to see how smaller developers handle creating games for a Nintendo system — especially seeing as how the company doesn't have the best track record when it comes to third parties. NOA president Reggie Fils-Aime, however, doesn't think it'll be a problem. "Independent developers armed with small budgets and big ideas will be able to get their original games into the marketplace to see if we can find the next smash hit."



GOD OF WAR'S JAFFE LEAVES SONY

NEW COMPANY IN WORKS

David Jaffe rose to prominence as the creator of smash PS2 hit God of War, but now the developer is moving on to create his own company, Eat Sleep Play.

Jaffe is enlisting the help of long-time colleague Scott Campbell for the studio. The pair worked together for years at Incognito/Singletrac bringing up the vaunted Twisted Metal series of games. Jaffe says that his new company has a three-game, console/handheld deal with Sony, and that we'll see the first new IP title from this in 2008.

"It's what we wanted: To go independent and see where we could steer our very own ship," said Jaffe on his infamous blog. "And the cool thing is, as small as our ship is, it's not the least bit scary. It's exciting as hell." Jaffe is similarly pumped about his upcoming project, which he says has already started. "The concept art is f— amazing, and I am crazy in love with game #1 already. Hope y'all like it when you see it in a bit."



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
MARTIN WALFISZ
Founder and president of
Massive Entertainment
(World in Conflict)



- 1 Diablo — PC
- 2 Half-Life 2 — PC
- 3 Warcraft II — PC
- 4 Doom — PC
- 5 Tekken Tag Tournament — PS2

READER
MARK DEAN
Raleigh, North Carolina



- 1 GoldenEye 007 — Nintendo 64
- 2 Counter-Strike Source — PC
- 3 Final Fantasy VII — PSone
- 4 StarCraft: Brood War — PC
- 5 The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind — Xbox

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Reasons for the Red Rings of Death on Xbox 360

- 10 "You know, things break."
- 9 Conserving its energy for Halo 3
- 8 It's sick of people on your friends list with names based on Dragon Ball Z characters
- 7 It's ready to mate
- 6 You "accidentally" TKed Bill Gates in an online match of Rainbow Six Vegas
- 5 The gerbil that powered the fan died. The blinking lights are telling you to replace it
- 4 Fear of playing Fuzion Frenzy 2
- 3 The blue screen of death was on vacation
- 2 Every time Jeff Bell speaks, a 360 dies
- 1 Since it can't wave a white flag, it blinks red to surrender to the Wii

Name That Game Answer: Mystic Heroes

VENGEANCE HAS NEVER BEEN SO BEAUTIFUL



HEAVENLY SWORD

Enter a mystical world where a heroine is caught between survival and vengeance. With the Heavenly Sword, Nariko mercilessly eviscerates her enemies using three different sword stances. Soon you'll discover why no hero has been more deadly. And why vengeance has never been so beautiful.

CELL
BROADBAND
ENGINE™

The PlayStation 3's Cell Broadband Engine™ allows you to encounter legions of enemies with their own individual, group and squad-based AI, ensuring that you'll never have the same experience twice.

BLU-RAY™
DISC

From high-resolution model data to countless physics, AI and animation programs, the massive amount of data in Heavenly Sword is only deliverable on Blu-ray.



PLAY BEYOND™

ONLY ON
PLAYSTATION 3



Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

On Campus

1980 ▼ Jenkins completes his undergraduate degree in political science and journalism at Georgia State University

Furthering Education

1985 ▼ Jenkins completes his masters in communication studies at the University of Iowa

The Doctor



1989 ▼ Completing his education, Jenkins gets his PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with his doctoral thesis "What Made Pastiche Hits? Anarchic Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic"

Professorship

1991 ▼ Jenkins accepts a teaching position at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Author! Author!

1992 ▼ Jenkins publishes his first major book, *Textual Poachers: Television, Fans & Participatory Culture*

Gaming Studies



1998 ▼ Jenkins (with Justine Cassell) co-edits *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, a collection of essays centered on gaming

In Congress

1999 ▼ Jenkins is called to testify before the Senate Commerce Committee on video game violence in the wake of the Columbine tragedy. Jenkins urges the senators to take a deeper look at the meaning and context of games in the lives of teenagers

The Game of Learning

2001 ▼ Jenkins helps start the Games-to-Teach Project, a Microsoft-funded initiative at MIT that seeks to incorporate games into education. The project eventually evolves into the Education Arcade (educationarcade.org)

Publishing Furry

2006 ▼ Jenkins releases three books in quick succession: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*; *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*; and the recently released *The Woom Cinema: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*

HENRY JENKINS

DIRECTOR, COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES, MIT

>> Henry Jenkins, a frequent defender of games in the media, is one of the leading thinkers about video games in the world. Recently, we spoke with Henry on his view of the industry and art form. <<

For our readers that aren't familiar with your work, what do you teach and research at MIT and how does it relate to games?

The core of what we teach is comparative media studies, which looks systematically at the history of human communication—how humans tell stories, how humans entertain each other, how we pass information from one generation to the next. As I look at those questions, I've thought about everything from science fiction to games to horror to comics to all forms of digital media.... Games have certainly been a central part of it for the last 16 years, but only one part of it.

Have you always been a fan of games?

Well, I'm old enough to have played Pong when it first came out. While I was engaged by it, it wasn't something that absolutely captured my imagination. I played Atari games and then went off to grad school and did nothing with games.... Sometime after about 10 years, my son wanted a Nintendo for Christmas. So, we bought it and plugged it in on Christmas morning and I remember seeing Super

a result of a generation that was raised on video games?

When I first plugged in Pong, the idea that you could interact with your television set was a radically new concept. My son has grown up in a world where interactions with your television set are taken for granted. He's part of the generation that's grown up online and has engaged with computers from early elementary forward. [This] generation thinks about media in fundamentally different ways. They increasingly expect that a story that really matters to them will extend across every available media platform. The interesting thing is that this has occurred as we are downsizing the expectation on education. For example, something like Pokémon requires a kid to master 250 species. Whereas, our schools are deciding that kids really couldn't understand the pantheon of Greek gods. [Laughs] That juxtaposition is a really ironic one. Gaming is expecting our kids to master more knowledge just to be able to play than our schools are demanding of our kids to grow as citizens and workers.

smaller number of games would reach that level, but I certainly think there are accomplishments in the medium to date that would qualify as art by almost any definition we'd want to apply. Luckily, the Constitution doesn't require that every game be a masterpiece to be protected by the First Amendment. It merely requests that games be an expressive medium that explores ideas, that shapes human experiences, and is a meaningful activity. I think, by those criteria, games are undeniably art.

So, if we accept that all games are art, how successful as an industry are games in terms of encouraging quality art and the pushing of boundaries?

[The] industry has moved out of a period of rapid innovation and into a period of standardization. There's a studio mode of production that dominates games. If we use Hollywood as an analogy, we know that, under a studio [system], two things happen. One is that the floor raises and the other is that the ceiling lowers. If you watch any film that came out in 1939, you're going to have an amazing

Gaming is expecting our kids to master more knowledge than our schools are demanding of our kids to grow as citizens and workers.

Mario Bros. for the first time. I was so blown away. It woke me up to the fact that here was as phenomenally important medium that we should be paying attention to from here on out. It was a transformative moment for me.

Is there a lot of research and writing being done on games in the academic community?

Academically, I think game studies have really started to come of age in the last 5 to 10 years. I could probably speak at a conference every week on some aspect of games.... There are two journals in the field that are regularly publishing about games. There's probably a book a month, at least, coming out of research on games as a medium. It's a much bigger field than most gamers realize or most of the game press realize. [The] problem is that, like most academic fields, the work tends to stay within the university setting.... The media in general gives much more attention in general to the small handful of media effects researchers that are working on game violence than it does to the hundreds of researchers who are studying games from every other possible angle.

Right now, we are experiencing a sea change in media, going from traditional media to a new paradigm where the user takes an active role in shaping, choosing, and reconfiguring the information. How much of this is

You've often been in the media defending video games. Have you seen any research that has demonstrated a link between violent games and violent behavior?

Nothing so far has convinced me that there's any direct link between violent video games and real-world violence. That's not to say that games cannot have social influence as any other medium can have social influence. It's that the media's construction of "You play a violent video game and you go out and shoot someone" is too simplistic to account for the research. I don't think, in fact, that any responsible researchers are making a connection that direct. If you read on their own terms the research that's out there, really what they're saying is that games could be one risk factor among many. Part of the problem is that the media and politicians want to grossly oversimplify the research that's out there—they want a simple answer. The research isn't giving a simple answer.

One thing that comes up in violence debates is the idea of whether or not games are protected speech, and whether or not games are art. Do you think all games are inherently art? Games are an expressive medium. An enormous amount of art goes into games. If we define art as a category of activity, there's no question that games constitute art. Do games achieve "capital A" art? Are they masterpieces? I would say a

Henry Jenkins on the MIT campus, where he has taught and researched the impact of new media and video games on human communication for the past 16 years

Jonathan Kanter

THE GAME ACADEMIC

able evening of entertainment. Some of them are masterpieces, some of them are not, but the standard was high. The problem is that a studio system crushes individual innovation and experimentation. It is very difficult for real change to take place within the art form. Yes, it is possible for Orson Welles to direct *Citizen Kane* in 1941. Yes, it is possible for Will Wright to make *Spore* for EA. But, in general, the creative talents of large numbers of people are not being harnessed for innovation; they're being put behind the plough to crank out an ever-growing number of expansion packs for existing franchises. [But] I'm feeling more optimistic the last year or so that we're seeing a number of things click into place that would support an independent games sector. We're seeing IndieCade, the first major independent games festival in the United States. We're seeing universities develop internal game labs, which allows for the healthy experimentation that student films have long done in relation to cinema. And we're moving toward digital distribution of content, which will break the stranglehold of the major game retailers on what content reaches the public. All those are step forward for regaining a healthy independent game sector that will push, in several ways, the EAs of the world to begin to innovate again.

Half-Life® 2: Episode Two

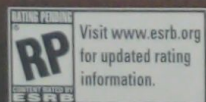
Team Fortress® 2

Portal™

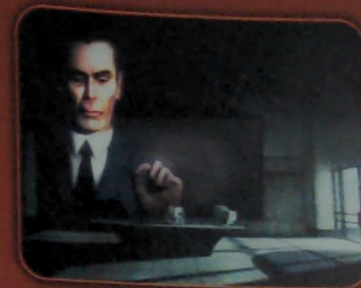


The Orange Box®

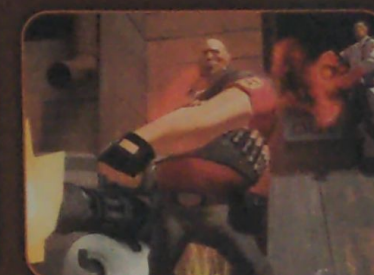
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PLAYSTATION 3



► The complete Half-Life 2 experience to date: **Half-Life 2 + Episode One & Two.**



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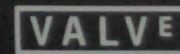
► **Portal:** Open your mind to an all-new way of gaming. Puzzle. Action. Adventure.



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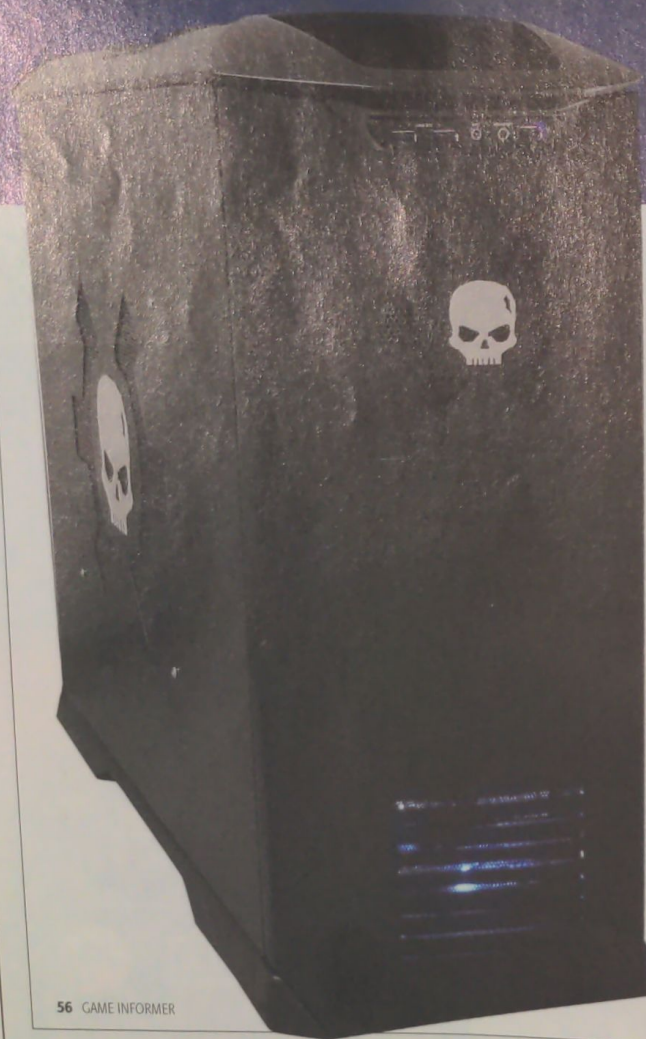
www.whatistheorangebox.com

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PC

WAR MACHINE ELITE LC



Apparently skulls never go out of style. After all, The Punisher has been rocking the look since the '70s. We hope this young PC maker, War Machine, is able to stick around just as long, because they make some quality hardware. We especially like how quiet the liquid cooling is in this powerful rig. The Elite's chassis has some nice features and is easy to customize – we only wish it wasn't so ridiculously huge. It scored just under some of the other PCs we have recently tested: 3DMark05 benchmarked at 11783 and PCMark05 scored a 7735. With its Dual XFX Nvidia 8800 Ultra video cards, this War Machine ran the F.E.A.R. framerate benchmark flawlessly, never dipping under 40 frames per second even at maximum settings. War Machine is not a bad option for those looking for a high-end PC.

Starting at \$1499, \$5199.00 (our configuration)
www.projectwarmachine.com

peripherals

LOGITECH CORDLESS PRECISION CONTROLLER

AVERAGE ●●●●●●●●

Logitech's new PS3 controller feels sturdy and comfortable, and produces a strong, non-Bluetooth wireless signal. Oddly, the Precision's most touted feature – rumble – seems almost worthless since no games support it yet, and it comes at the cost of lost tilt functionality. The Precision also does not have a built-in rechargeable battery, though two AA batteries should last up to 50 hours. Most baffling, though, is that the Precision does not support full backward compatibility, and only works with a few PSone and PS2 games. This isn't a bad controller, but it probably caters to too specific a crowd. Only concern yourself with this if you must be the first to experience rumble on the PS3.

\$39.99 • www.logitech.com



MIDWAY

RATING PENDING
 RP
 CONTENT RATED BY
 ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org
 for updated rating
 information.

PC
 DVD-ROM
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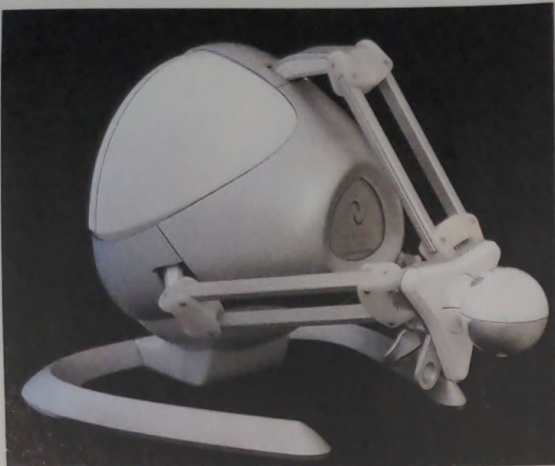


XBOX 360 LIVE
 PLAYSTATION 3

Games
 for Windows

blacksitegame.com

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tech NOVINT FALCON

At first glance the Falcon might look like a NASA space tool instead of a unique PC peripheral. The Falcon's internal motors simulate the feel of different textures, such as ice or sandpaper, as well as the kickback from gunfire. While this makes a cool toy for PC enthusiasts, it probably isn't the smart choice for financially conscious gamers. The system works with Half-Life 2 via a mod, and comes with several poorly designed minigames, but it really needs more support. Maybe if Novint can get some big publishers on board to utilize its tech it will have something. As it stands, all the Novint Falcon offers is a few cool tech demos, a terrible menu system, and a whole lot of promise.

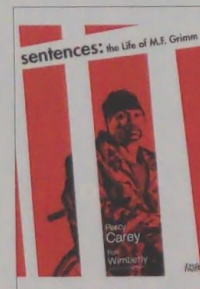
\$189.00 • home.novint.com



books HALO: CONTACT HARVEST

Penned by one of Bungie's head writers, Joseph Staten, *Contact Harvest* tells how humanity first came in contact with the Covenant. Told from the perspective of Staff Sergeant Avery Johnson, the book details the events that led to war, and eventually the first Halo game. Check your local bookstore for this one starting October 2.

\$14.95 • www.tor-forge.com



books SENTENCES: THE LIFE OF M.F. GRIMM

The more cultured among us understand that graphic literature (yeah, we're talking comic books) are a valid and influential form of art. For those of you who disagree, don't be surprised if someone walks up to you with a copy of *Sentences* and rubs your nose in it. *Sentences* is the autobiographical account of Percy Carey, otherwise known as M.F. Grimm, who rises into the hip-hop scene just before falling into a wheelchair, and eventually lands in jail. This is truly an inspiring tale worthy of anyone's time. Comic haters, you have been warned.

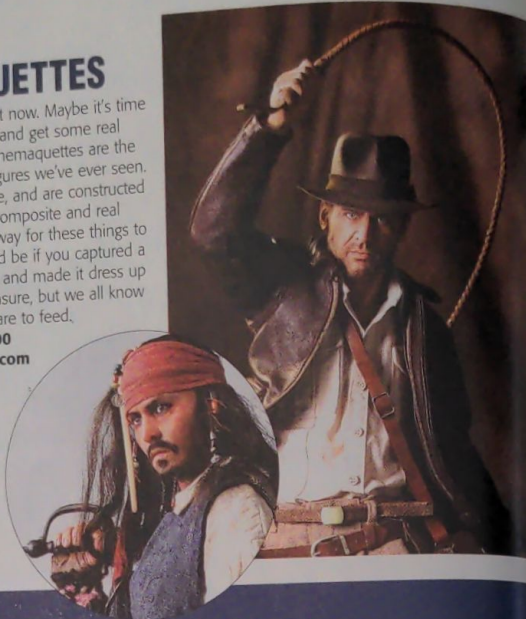
\$19.99 • www.dccomics.com/graphic_novels

etc. CINEMAQUETTES

All right, you're an adult now. Maybe it's time you put away the toys and get some real movie memorabilia. Cinemaquettes are the most highly detailed figures we've ever seen. They come at 1:3 scale, and are constructed using a polyurethane composite and real human hair. The only way for these things to get more life-like would be if you captured a small magical creature and made it dress up and pose for your pleasure, but we all know how expensive those are to feed.

\$1,000.00 - \$1,750.00
www.cinemaquette.com

■ Predator, The Godfather, and Bruce Lee fans take note, because Cinemaquette is working on sculpts for those properties as well.



tech

HELIO OCEAN

If you're sick of the man sticking it to you when it comes to data rates on your cell phone, ditch your high-priced carrier for the fair-priced convenience of the Helio Ocean. The Helio service offers several affordable plans that each includes unlimited text messaging, picture messaging, email, IM, GPS, and web surfing. The high-speed 3G network makes surfing on the go a breeze, and the intuitive phone interface is one of the best we've seen. This sleek phone won't be confused with your dad's boring Verizon phone, either. The device slides two ways to reveal a full keyboard for writing emails and a numeric keypad for quick dialing or gaming. On the con side, the bulky phone feels heavy in your pocket and the slider hinge seems weak enough to wear out after prolonged use. We also wish there was support for Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync. But overall the Helio Ocean is a well-featured phone that nearly achieves greatness.

\$295.00 • www.helio.com



GAME INFORMER 58

READER REVIEW



GAMER OF THE WEEK

Name: Ted Krinshaw

Age: 15

Hometown: Tallahassee, Florida

PROS: InverteBOTS rocks! I recommend being the King scorpion. You get killer claws and one wicked stinger. Definitely the best attack combos.

CONS: The match-ups can get kinda unrealistic. I don't care who you are, an amped-up ant could never take a teched-out tarantula. Game over.

Tommy VERTEBOTS

So there you sit on your couch, watching your favorite show on TV. You hear a thump, but you're too lazy to crank your head up to the window to see. Your dog begins barking. You feel something in the ground. Your dog stops barking. Actually, where is your dog? Then suddenly a stinger the size of a telephone pole comes crashing through your roof, directly into your mom's best china. You look outside to see a 60-foot robotic scorpion laying waste to your neighborhood. And all you can say is "Sweet."

Enter the InverteBOTS, the newest creation from POWERSOURCE 360. A re-creation of Rampage, InverteBOTS's premise is simple. If you can't grasp it, you can smash it. Set in the not-too-distant future, the world's machines have become modeled after the most resilient organisms on Earth: bugs. Techno-exoskeleton superbugs with the mechanical mandibles make mayhem in mankind. And you're behind the wheel. America, we need you.

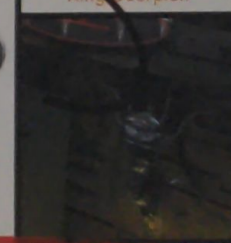
And from your pesky opponent sitting next to you, you'll have to fend off ranks of army ants, maniacal mayflies, and one bad mother sucker, the Mosquito.

It has multi-function modes of play, from one- and two-player missions to a free-for-all bug-bashing to a head-to-head torso-writhing roughhouse.

Lifelike graphics and just enough computerization to let you level a city block without feeling too bad. And with independent controlling options that allow you to move each arm and leg individually, it's not all that hard, either.



King Scorpion



Super Fly

FIND YOUR WAY TO TELL A FRIEND
WWW.ABOVETHEINFLUENCE.COM

VIDEO GAMES IN SCHOOLS?

SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



BY DAVID HUTCHISON, Ph.D.
AUTHOR, *PLAYING TO LEARN: VIDEO GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM*

In early 2006, I set about writing a hands-on book for teachers that included plenty of ideas for integrating the study of video games into the elementary and high school classroom. I had previously spoken with many young teachers-by-day who were also gamers at night. Most had never considered the idea of bringing their passion for gaming into the classroom.

Given the proliferation of video game magazines, websites, blogs, and user forums, I was convinced that there must be at least a few language arts connections teachers could make with video games. The most obvious ideas were to invite interested students to write review and preview articles for the games they were playing or anticipating. More focused grammar and sentence structure lessons could focus on proofreading and copyediting online video game user reviews which helpfully tend to be on the short side (and sometimes in dire need of editing).

But what about other school subjects, such as math? I thought about the proliferation of statistics in video games – the wide variety of ways in which numbers are used to track a player's progress through a game, the leaderboard rankings in multiplayer games, and the opportunities for performing driving calculations (distance = speed x time) in racing games. Students could even be invited to look up the fuel efficiency ratings for some of the real-world cars in their favorite racing games in order to calculate just how much "virtual gas" they had used in their travels so far.

When it comes to science, one of the cool things about video games is the way they often break the laws of the physical universe that we have no choice but to honor in the real world. Several years ago, I came up with an activity idea that invited children to watch a half-hour *Scooby-Doo Mysteries* episode and count the number of times the cartoon characters broke the laws

of physics and did the impossible. The resulting classroom discussion could serve as a natural lead in to introducing the laws of gravity and other scientific principles.

I also wanted to cast students in the role of social scientists studying the video game phenomena from a researcher's perspective. I developed a social studies activity in which students design a "Video Game Playing Habits" survey which they then administer (anonymously and with permission) to their peers. Another activity challenges students to brainstorm a set of interview questions for a one-on-one research study with male and female gamers of various ages.

Some of the most rewarding activity ideas focus on history. I considered the many ways in which so-called "period games," such as the *Call of Duty* series, could be used to augment the study of World War II, for example, by having students research the historical weaponry of the period (as featured in the game) or compare screenshots of the game with actual photos taken during the war.

Of course, not all video games aim for historical authenticity. Many are the stuff of pure fantasy, but that too has educational value. In writing the "Alternate History" activity, I considered the historical implications of the 2003 game *Freedom Fighters* which imagines a fictional world in which the Soviet Union has won the Cold War (similar to the *World in Conflict* game due out this year). This activity asks students to create alternate timelines for major events in U.S. and world history. How would the world today be different if the outcome of these events had been strikingly different?

The recent interest in video games on the part of the American Medical Association reinforces the connections that can be made between gaming and health studies. I designed activities that ask students to track the amount of time they spend playing video games each week. Other lesson ideas focus on the science of ergonomics and the

When non-gamers ask

me where

I traveled

during my

sabbatical,

I get quiz-

zical looks

from them

when I reply

Azeroth,

Stalingrad,

and planet

Earth in

2142.

risks associated with repetitive stress injury. Some of the contributors to the book (journalists, scholars, and bloggers) focus on health topics ranging from video game addiction to the controversy over the effects of violent gameplay on gamers. A physical education activity that challenges students to design their own brand-new sport proved to be one of the most popular activities with students, according to some of the teachers who tested and provided feedback on the activities.

As I continued writing *Playing to Learn*, I was determined to find some way of addressing the most infamous video game of all. The activity "Kid-friendly Grand Theft Auto" asks students to brainstorm possible gameplay scenarios for a youth-oriented GTA-inspired open-world game that challenges young gamers to safely navigate a city on foot, bike, or skateboard, run a marathon, trade baseball cards and comic books, build a treehouse or fort, and return a library book in record time etc.

I wrote *Playing to Learn* while on sabbatical leave from teaching. When nongamers ask me where I traveled during my sabbatical, I get quizzical looks from them when I reply Azeroth, Stalingrad, and planet Earth in 2142. If you are a teacher of language arts, math, science, social studies, business studies, physical education, computers, or the arts, I encourage you to think about the myriad ways video games can be integrated into the school curriculum. Millions of students and teachers are playing video games in their out-of-school lives, so it makes plenty of sense to forge sound pedagogical connections between gaming and education, especially if, like me, you believe video games are in many ways vanguards of the future. ■ ■ ■

David Hutchison, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, Brock University and the author of *Playing to Learn: Video Games in the Classroom* (Teacher Ideas Press, 2007). More information about the book can be found at www.playingtolearn.org.

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Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow - 09/04

NEW RELEASES

- BlackSite: Area 51 - PS3, 360, PC
- Devil's Adventure - Wii
- Drawn to Life - DS
- Experiment 112 - PC
- Heavenly Sword - PS3
- Heroes of the Pacific - PSP
- Hooked - Wii
- Kengo Legends of the 9 - 360
- My Word Coach - DS
- Nancy Drew - DS
- NBA 08 - PS3

04-05

- NHL 2K8 - PS3, 360, PS2
- Project Gotham Racing 4 - 360
- The Office - PC
- Race Driver - DS
- Resident Evil Bundle Pack - PS2
- Skate - 360
- Syphon Filter: Dark Sinner - PS2
- Worms: Open Warfare 2 - PSP

06

AUSTIN GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE
5-7
This show is many things in one. It's the AGDC, the Women's Game Conference, and also Bryan Vore's Amazing Pancake Show. You are in town. This is the place where the best of the best meet.

07

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #544

After shamelessly tying the comic series to the movie, Marvel is getting the Spider-Man books back on track starting with this issue. Dubbed "One More Day," this issue starts off what Marvel is calling Spider-Man's darkest hour. Word on the streets is that either Mary Jane or Aunt May will likely die in this issue.

14

FINAL FANTASY MASTER CREATURES 2

Your shelves may be lined with Final Fantasy toys, but your collection won't be complete until you add a Knights of the Round piece to it. The second series of Master Creatures also boasts Odin, Yojimbo, and Mateus, the Corrupt.

21

RESIDENT EVIL: EXTINCTION

Resident Evil: Extinction opens in theaters today, and despite what your gut tells you, this movie looks badass. It looks like the bastard child of *Mad Max* and *Resident Evil*. Let's hope there's a little *Fifth Element* in the DNA as well.

18-19

NEW RELEASES

- Cabela's Trophy Bucks - 360, PS2
- Coded Arms: Contagion - PSP
- CSI: Dark Motives - DS
- CSI 3: Dimension of Murder - PS2
- CSI 4: Hard Evidence - PC
- Digimon World: Dawn/Dusk - DS
- Eternal Sonata - 360
- Hot PXL - PSP
- Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights - PS3, 360, PS2, PSP, DS

- Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal - 360, Wii, PS2
- My Sims - Wii, DS
- Namco Museum - DS
- Skate - PS3
- Sonic Rush Adventure - DS
- Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron - PSP
- Turok - PS3, 360
- Warriors Orochi - 360, PS2
- World in Conflict - PC
- Worms: Open Warfare 2 - PSP

25-26

NEW RELEASES

- America's Army: True Soldiers - 360
- Battalion Wars 2 - Wii
- Chessmaster - DS
- Chibi-Robo: Park Patrol - DS
- Cods & Heroes: Rome Rising - PC
- Halo 3 - 360
- Heroes of Might & Magic V: Tribes - PC
- Jackson: The Game - PS2, PSP

- Luxor 2 - DS
- Pursuit Force 2 - PSP
- Sega Rally Revo - PS3, 360, PSP, PC
- World Series of Poker 2008 - PS3, 360, PS2, PSP, PC

27

THE INJUSTICE LEAGUE
Crossing over, the Justice League of America has more than enough trouble to deal with. Well, things go from bad to worse with the formation of the Injustice League, which would appear to have Joker and Lex Luthor in its ranks. To say the least, this issue should be interesting.

Heavenly Sword - 09/04



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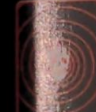
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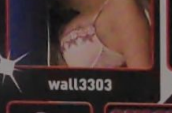
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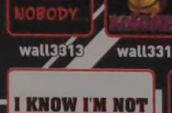
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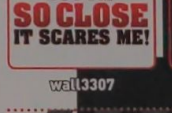
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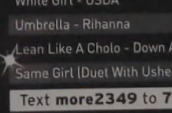
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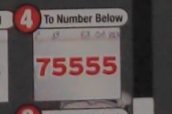
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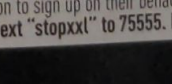
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BORDERLANDS

THE FINAL FRONTIER

IN THE DISTANT FUTURE, SEVEN COLONIZATION SHIPS DEPART FOR THE EDGE OF THE GALAXY. THEIR PASSENGERS SEEK A BETTER LIFE AND THE UNTOLD MINERAL RESOURCES OF THE REMOTE PLANET PANDORA.

After years of travel, the caravan finally reaches its destination. The mix of settlers, prospectors, scientists, and corporate lackeys set about dismantling the ships and converting them into makeshift settlements. It eventually becomes clear that there is little on the desolate planet outside of decrepit alien ruins. Those who have the money leave, and the remaining stranded population devolves into lawlessness. Some seek to get rich by hunting down remnants of alien technology. Most are just trying to survive. After seven Earth years, Pandora's slow orbit finally enters spring and countless horrifying creatures emerge from hibernation. Just when the colony is set to implode on itself, a beacon of hope emerges. One key discovery has the potential to change not just Pandora itself, but the entire galaxy. Welcome to *Borderlands* – a game unlike any other, yet still innately familiar.

While working on projects in the *Halo* and *Half-Life* franchises and its own *Brothers In Arms* games, developer Gearbox Software has been kicking around another idea. As huge fans of the *Diablo* series, team members wanted to blend that level of addictive loot grinding and leveling up with the fast-paced action of first-person shooters. Gearbox had proven itself in the FPS realm, but how would it satisfy that insatiable RPG desire for a constant flow of new weapons and items? *Borderlands* utilizes a revolutionary weapons system that features over half a million guns. Combine that with rich frontier lore, violent vehicle combat, and gameplay built for co-op from the beginning, and that *Diablo*-caliber level of addiction doesn't seem so far out of reach.



■ Settlements are being designed around a gritty high tech philosophy

■ At one point, bandits will hijack a massive mining machine. Players will jump into it and experience something akin to a futuristic pirate ship battle.

■ New Haven leader Helena Pierce (right) is jokingly referred to as "Dealbreaker" around the Gearbox offices

"I love [Diablo] because I always want a bigger sword or more armor," says Gearbox president Randy Pitchford. "The thing is, it's really almost a stupidly simple game. You just point the cursor over the icon and click, and that's what it takes to play Diablo. But it didn't matter because you were so addicted to all of the stuff." With *Borderlands*, Pitchford hopes to combine the obsession that lead him to max out several characters in the RPG classic with the twitch skills and immersion of a first-person shooter. It's clear, however, which side the focus is on.

"This is, first and foremost, a first-person shooter," clarifies *Borderlands* producer Simon Hurley. Gearbox is careful to distance its game from gun-based RPGs like *Mass Effect* and *Fallout 3*. Players won't be pausing the action to select attack points or worrying about hit percentages. Anyone who's

ever wielded a shotgun in *Doom* or an assault rifle in *Halo* will be able to jump right into *Borderlands'* interesting mix of gameplay. But instead of raiding dungeons, Gearbox has created a world filled with *Deadwood's* frontier grit, *Mad Max's* deadly vehicles, and some Indiana Jones-style fortune hunting.

The story follows three characters, Roland, Mordecai, and Lilith, as they pursue their own motives on the volatile planet of Pandora. After years of struggle on the recently populated world, the citizens are rallying around the discovery of a mysterious metal vault carved into the side of a mountain. This massive structure is thought to be from the same ancient alien race whose technology has been discovered elsewhere in the galaxy. This tech has not only pushed science forward by leaps and bounds, it's also made those who discovered it extremely rich. The vault is thought to contain all of the aliens'

secrets, drawing those in search of wealth, power, and scientific advancement. The trouble is, the people who discovered it were completely wiped out by some kind of protective force. Only a scattered radio transmission remains - hinting at the vault's majesty, but not its location. The main characters aren't necessarily after the vault's contents at the outset, but their personal quests will most assuredly lead them to it (see sidebar).

Our demo begins in a settlement called New Haven, an appropriately named town that's managed to secure itself from roaming Brigadiers (known more commonly as

bandits) and indigenous creatures. Unofficial mayor Helena Pierce makes the rules in this dusty settlement that consists mostly of ramshackle metal huts cobbled together from the good ship "Haven." She's been having trouble recently with attacks from a flying species called rakk and tasks Roland to destroy a hive with explosive cesium charges that only bandits have. In the distance, you can see Mordecai sniping a stray rakk with a tracking device.

While stopping to load up on guns and equipment, the shopkeeper asks if you can activate a transporter holed up in a bandit infested military bunker so that

he can get his stuff out of it. On the way out of town, Helena offers you an extra reward for assassinating a bandit leader, since you'll be swiping the cesium anyway. Gearbox is specifically structuring the game so that players will always be juggling several quests of varying length and complexity. "We're encouraging the player to just play five more minutes to get something new," says Hurley. "Sometimes it's just a new gun, sometimes you finish a quest, and sometimes it's another piece of the story that clicks into place." This simultaneously allows players to make meaningful progress even in brief bursts while also encouraging the "just one more" kind of gameplay that can unintentionally lead to marathon sessions.

As you head out to the ominous canyons, the game generates a unique instance for the road ahead. While the general path remains consistent, things like barriers, caves, bunkers, towers, enemies, and explosive



MORDECAI

Mordecai came to Pandora in search of someone from his past. When New Haven leader Helena Pierce informs him that this man, Quinn, died a year ago, Mordecai sets off to uncover how he died and what he was carrying.

More of a lone ranger, this character specializes in sniping enemies from afar. One skill called "Angel on your Shoulder" gives a critical hit boost to allies whenever he headshots an enemy attacking said allies. Mordecai can also simply give a boost to his party's accuracy stats. Partway through the game, he will befriend an alien creature that will assist in combat.

ROLAND

This former soldier of the Crimson Lance is content to stick around on Pandora as a hired gun. A decade-old vendetta is rekindled when the leader of the Brigadiers is said to have a suspiciously similar name to a man Roland swore to kill.

All three characters have three focus skills with multiple functions that they can cycle through in-game without having to go to a menu screen. Roland's Leadership skill, for example, raises experience gained for everyone in the party while Medical can increase health regeneration. If he switches over to Support, it will do things like increase weapons damage or ammo regeneration.



LILITH

Lilith is one of only six Sirens in the galaxy, a group of people with ridiculous powers but no way to control them. Gearbox describes her as a mix between *Firefly's* River and *The Matrix's* Trinity, with some kind of untapped power combined with speedy moves and quick learning skills. Lilith hears that there is another Siren on Pandora and seeks whoever it is out in hopes that she can discover more about herself.

The image on the left shows her in regular form while the right design means she's ready to kick ass. She serves essentially as the mage of the group, with powers like increasing the group's rate of fire and creating temporal bubbles that slow down enemies and projectiles or speed up allies. Not much more is known on how she will incorporate magic into *Borderlands'* FPS gameplay style.





■ Tagging the rakg with a tracking device



■ Scythid sprinters enjoy tipping people out of their buggies and tearing them apart with their retractable fists



cacti will be different every time you return. Sometimes there will be a cave to explore. Other times it'll simply be a blank wall. All of this occurs with absolutely no loading whatsoever. In fact, players will never see a single load screen once they've entered the game.

A bandit camp appears up ahead, but there's already a scuffle in place. A four-legged beast with a natural metallic plating over its head and back is attacking the bandit group. Again, this is not scripted. This "skag" happened to be generated next to hostile forces so it decided to get aggressive. Roland mows down some distracted troops while the rest of them aim for the tender spots on the skag's side and unload clips into its mouth as it jumps at them. Once the beast falls, the bandits turn to face us. Though the AI is still unfinished, we're still able to get an idea about how these untrained rebels

fight. Since they're just a bunch of common thugs with no military experience, the bandits shoot from the hip and aren't all that concerned with cover. They clamber over walls and hop gaps to get a better shot at you.

After the smoke clears, a bounty of weapons, gear, and items lies scattered across the ground. All of the resulting loot was actually equipped on the troops during battle, so if you see an enemy with a particularly flashy gun, it can be yours the instant you take him out. As you pass the aiming reticle over loot, its name and stats appear in a color-coded box similar to what you'd see in an MMO (dark gray indicates weak, green means better, etc.). The variety of handguns, shotguns, rifles, and machine guns is staggering. Throughout our time with Borderlands we never saw the same gun twice, and Gearbox claims the same will be true



■ Skags have a natural armor plating that renders traditional headshots ineffective

when players go through the final game.

"Back when I first started making shooters at 3D Realms on Duke Nukem, the rule was the PC keyboard had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and zero. That's how many guns you could have in your game," says Pitchford. "It's going to be all different now." He boasts that "you can take every shooter in this entire generation on the Xbox 360, all of the weapons that every one of them has, add them all together and this game has more - two orders of magnitude more."

Thousands upon thousands of barrels, grips, knife attachments, ammo, and clips are mixed and matched resulting in over 500,000 unique weapons. "There are a lot of strong checks and balances," says director Matthew Armstrong. "It's very procedural as opposed to completely random. These guns are being built intelligently." Every gun will have a unique name that suits what it does and its own mix of sounds, including reload and fire noises.

We saw a ridiculous amount of guns, but perhaps the strangest was a revolver that fired shotgun shells. Gearbox is constantly surprised with what the system



ANATOMY OF A GUN JAKOBS SVR 9710-X "THUNDER" COMBAT SHOTGUN

Every single one of over 500,000 weapons in Borderlands has a unique name, a unique look, and unique personality. These weapons are not randomly generated, but procedurally crafted. One such weapon is the Jakobs SVR 9710-X "Thunder" Combat Shotgun, a rare and high quality weapon that is more effective than most shotguns at longer ranges. Slow to fire and reload, it more than compensates by doing massive damage, having a tight spread, and featuring a minor temporal effect that slows enemies.

THE SIGHT

With a tight spread and good range, this shotgun benefits from a quality sight

THE BODY

A heavy body provides good recoil reduction but a fairly slow fire rate



THE STOCK (JAKOBS SIGNATURE)

Solid, high quality wood grain is the signature of Jakobs weapons. The stock is extremely stable, but the weight makes the gun harder to use while moving. A person who wants to fight on the run should seek out a shotgun with a pistol grip or lighter stock

THE CYLINDER

This shotgun has a five shot smooth cylinder. Not bad, but not the best either

THE BARREL (RARE PART)

Broad and heavy, but long as well, this barrel brings good damage and a tight spread

JAKOBS

A low tech but high quality family owned manufacturer, Jakobs weapons are powerful, doing more damage than almost any other manufacturer, but the weight tends to result in a lower fire rate. Jakobs weapons are especially well suited for sniper rifles and shotguns

"THUNDER"

A longer effective range than most shotguns coupled with extreme damage has earned this weapon the nickname "Thunder." Many of the better quality weapons you will find in the Borderlands will have such nicknames

COMBAT SHOTGUNS

The Combat Shotgun is a pump-action short range weapon. Ammo is fired from a cylinder allowing for a fairly quick breach reloading action

comes up with. They've seen rifles shoot everything from homing darts to rockets. "One of the guns tracks onto something and locks, and after three seconds [the target] suddenly explodes," Armstrong says. Even though guns are the focus of Borderlands, items and armor tally up to a half million as well. Every piece

health, and rain down fiery death from above.

Of course, players can choose to take all of the loot for themselves or they can share with up to three friends in full on and offline co-op. Basically, one player will start up a game and the remaining players will visit that world with their persistent characters. All loot and

says. "Except if I talk to Simon and say I'm playing this new game and it's great, and he says 'Oh s---, I'm playing that game, too.' 'Great, I'm playing as the soldier.' 'Oh, then we can't play together.' That's awful. The fact is, fundamentally, we want a fun game and a lot of things we'll bend down for fun."

YOU CAN TAKE EVERY SHOOTER IN THIS ENTIRE GENERATION ON THE XBOX 360, ALL OF THE WEAPONS THAT EVERY ONE OF THEM HAS, ADD THEM ALL TOGETHER AND THIS GAME HAS MORE - TWO ORDERS OF MAGNITUDE MORE.

-RANDY PITCHFORD

of armor alters your appearance in a different way, including a custom accessory type that's specific to each of the three main characters. Additionally, you'll need shields, energy generators, storage decks, and glove microchips that allow you to program grenades to do many strange things like track vehicles, steal

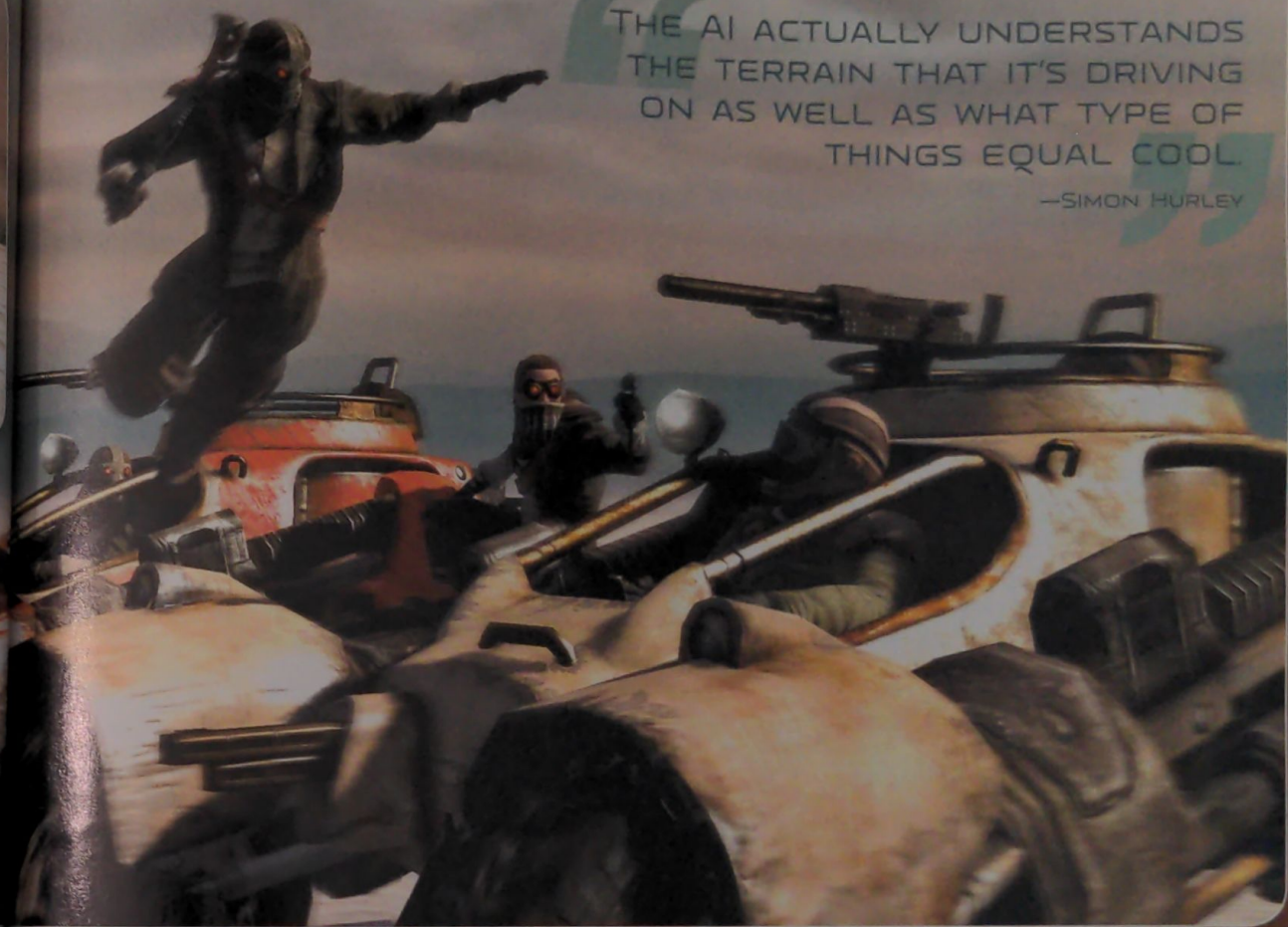
leveling will be reflected when the visiting characters return to their own game. But with only three different characters, how will the game support a four-player mode? "Early on we had a very strong discussion [on whether] we should limit this to three character co-op and say you pick one of these characters," Armstrong

Even though it's possible to have four Liliths running around in a party, it may not be the most effective way to play. All three characters have unique focus skills that are meant to compliment each other. Armstrong points out that you could have a bunch of Rolands with health regeneration skills maxed, but you're going to wish someone had ammo generating skills once you run out of bullets. Even if there are some repeated characters in your party, however, everyone will be wearing different armor and helmets anyway, so it's not like you'll have to worry much about the clone trooper effect.

The bandits' melee weapon of choice is basically a buzz saw on a stick



Vehicle explosions involve a ridiculous amount of shrapnel, tires, and bodies



“THE AI ACTUALLY UNDERSTANDS THE TERRAIN THAT IT'S DRIVING ON AS WELL AS WHAT TYPE OF THINGS EQUAL COOL.”

—SIMON HURLEY

Even if you don't have any friends, you don't necessarily have to go it alone. AI allies will crop up from time to time to give you a hand if you'd like. Depending on the mission ahead, players can select from among a medic, sniper, or gunner for support, in addition to the other two main characters. Squad

After several of the choicest goods are raided from treasure chests and fallen bandits, it's time to spend the skill points received from leveling up. Players can choose to increase any number of stats like health and ammo capacity, dash speed, jump distance, accuracy, or critical hit damage (a.k.a. headshots). Outside of

the best way to travel is by snagging a vehicle.

Roland and Mordecai hop in a desert buggy and take off in the direction of the tracking signal. Upon entering a vehicle, the view pulls out to third-person and you can decide whether to man the wheel or turret while leaving the other role to the AI or a human player. Unlike most FPSs, you're not shoehorned into being the driver all of the time. Gearbox is putting a special focus on properly functioning driving AI. “The AI actually understands the terrain that it's driving on as well as what type of things equal cool,” says Hurley. We witnessed this AI in action in a wide open desert area with

plenty of bumps and hills. Mordecai provided a steady ride for aiming purposes, found some nice jumps, and managed to steer clear of any walls or head-on collisions with other vehicles. But if you'd like to take the wheel at any time you can swap roles at the press of a button. This goes for co-op as well. “In co-op mode if you both hit the melee button at the same time you can swap seats, which is nice and convenient if you

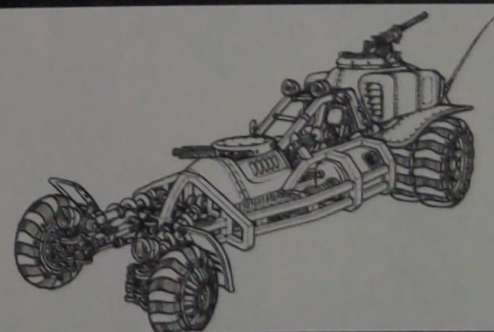
like a little Mario Double Dash action in your first-person shooter,” Armstrong jokes.

Early on, players will mostly have to rely on stealing bandit buggies, but eventually they will receive higher end models worth hanging on to. They can select the paint job or wheel type and, once again, choose from tens of thousands of turrets. We saw the basic rocket in action, and while it can take out buggies with one well-placed shot, rocket launchers take some practice to hit speeding rivals with. If you do connect, however, shards of metal and ragdoll bodies go flying in a blast of smoke and fire. Perhaps the most impressive display is the errant tires that will continue to bounce and roll until they hit a particularly sizeable bump or get run over.

Once the roaming bandits have been dealt with, Roland and Mordecai proceed towards the hive. Several aggressive rakk appear as you speed through the canyon. The hive must be close. But once you emerge from the canyon, it's clear that the rakk don't come from some nest stuck to a wall. A towering beast built like a trunkless elephant stomps through the plains as rakk

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Gearbox has enlisted famous concept artist Ron Cobb to work with the company's internal art team to craft some of Borderlands' futuristic vehicles. A small sample of Cobb's resume includes designs for aliens in the cantina scene of *Star Wars*, the *Nostramo* ship in *Alien*, the Nazi Flying Wing in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and production design on *Conan the Barbarian*. The vehicle shown here is called a Salt Racer. Its front wheels are spread apart for maneuvering at slow speeds, but once you reach a high enough speed on the open salt flats they will retract in to form more of a drag racer shape.



“WE'RE BUILDING THIS GAME FROM THE START AS A CO-OP GAME THAT YOU CAN PLAY BY YOURSELF.”

—MATTHEW ARMSTRONG

commands are simple: “stay close,” “stay far,” and “stay here.” Allies will wait for you to shoot first before they attack or they will return fire if shot at, so you shouldn't have to worry about them broadcasting your position. You can also equip them with weapons and gear and decide how they'll level up. “We're building this game from the start as a co-op game that you can play by yourself,” Armstrong says.

these general boosts, each character also has three unique focus skill trees to develop.

With cesium charges in hand, Roland activates the transporter found in one of the bunkers to get his reward from the shopkeeper. A vast network of transporters will be scattered all throughout Pandora to make traversing areas you've already visited that much simpler. When venturing out to new territory, however,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 73 **

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squirm in and out through gaping holes on its back. You stare in awe for a brief moment before this living hive turns to notice you. It unleashes an earth-rumbling roar and a rush of rakk come streaming out.

Mordecai hits the gas as you unload turret fire into the cloud of screeching rakk that's quickly approaching. The flying beasts tear at you and attempt to flip your buggy. Once the skies are mostly clear, Mordecai guns it towards the hive. It rears up to stomp you underfoot, but he swerves to safety at the last second. You take aim at the hive's eyes on one side and they explode into a goopy mess. It roars again to summon another swarm, but this time a particularly nasty bull rakk leads the pack. It swoops in and smashes into the side of your buggy, sending it cartwheeling through the plains.

You land among some rocks, but Mordecai is left exposed without cover. You run out to blast away the bull rakk and drag your comrade back to shelter. After patching him up, you toss a MIRV grenade that fragments and creates a series of explosions. This distraction gives you just enough time to hustle up to higher ground. You pick off attacking rakk while Mordecai snipes out the hive's remaining eyes. Another roar and swarm cycle ensues. Mordecai whips out a couple of pistols to stave off the angry swarm and you ready your rocket launcher to take the hive down once and for all.

We won't spoil the rest of the boss fight, but we can say that it ends with ever-increasing intensity. Just imagine battling this thing alongside three friends and a couple of vehicles. Everyone can take on different roles in the battle according to the way they've customized their character up to that point.

"Every item, all of the gear you get, all of your skills, and all of your weapons add up to providing an experience that we hope, if you're smart about it, is going to support your style," Pitchford says. "We want the styles to be really different. We want everybody to play the game the way they want to play."

Pitchford wants to walk through a crowd of enemies like the Terminator, with bullets ping-pong off his character while he leisurely blows goons away. Armstrong prefers to snipe everyone from a mile away and stroll through a body-littered meadow.

"So you hear Matt [Armstrong] talk about the guy he wishes he was and the guy I wish I was and how different those guys are," Pitchford says. "If we were making Doom or Quake or Half-Life or a game where you're the character, and your identity's fixed by your capabilities and your weapons and the world's very confined by that, we'd have to argue about that and one of us would win or we'd compromise. But we don't have to in this game, because I can be my guy and balance my skills to be the way I want to play, and he can be his guy. We can both exist in this game and that was the goal. However I want to play my FPS, I can do that."

But perhaps the most intriguing element of Borderlands is the uncertainty inherent in having half a million guns. After all, Gearbox is mostly working on real world guns right now. Once they throw in alien guns and all of the strange powers that go along with them, all bets are off. "It's going to freak us out," Pitchford says. "We have no idea. There's no possible way we could know all of the weapons and equipment that are capable of being generated. The only people who hate what we're doing is our test department."

"Someone's going to find the alien gun that does something ridiculous and amazing," says Armstrong. "My first reaction isn't going to be 'Oh, well that breaks the game.' My first reaction is going to be 'That is the game.' Looking for that gun is your goal." ■ ■ ■

Check out *Unlimited* for a look at Gearbox's revolutionary motion capture system that's so cutting edge, Hollywood hasn't even picked up on it yet.

■ Rakk fly in and out of the hive's back in a suitably disgusting manner



KILLZONE™ 2

SOMETHING TO PROVE

THE E3 OF 2005 WAS A SHARP CONTRAST TO THE ONE THAT TIRED JOURNALISTS FLEW BACK FROM EARLIER THIS JULY. FOR MOST, THIS YEAR BROUGHT FEW SURPRISES. GAMES THAT HAD BEEN SEEN BEFORE WERE THE NORM, AND ANNOUNCEMENTS WERE RARE, EVEN IF THE PROSPECTS FOR THE COMING MONTHS OF NEXT GENERATION GAMING ARE STAGGERINGLY EXCITING. NOT SO IN 2005, WHEN NEXT-GEN GAMING WAS STILL


ON THE HORIZON. CONSOLE ANNOUNCEMENTS WERE ALMOST MORE PLENTIFUL THAN ANYONE COULD KEEP TRACK OF, AND THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE GAME TRAILERS THAT ACCOMPANIED THEM WERE HARD TO BELIEVE. AMONG THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS STRING OF IMPOSSIBILITIES, ONE EMERGED AS THE TALK OF THE SHOW — A TRAILER THAT HAD TO BE SEEN TO BE BELIEVED. KILLZONE 2 LOOKED SO OVER-THE-TOP, INTENSE, AND GRAPHICALLY

IMPRESSIVE THAT IT COULDN'T POSSIBLY BE REAL. AMID THE SPECULATION AND HYPE, THE GAME MAKERS REMAINED LARGELY SILENT. TWO YEARS LATER, THE GAME IS UP AND RUNNING IN REAL TIME, AND FULLY PLAYABLE. THE PROMISE OF THAT ORIGINAL FILM MAY HAVE SEEMED A LITTLE DISINGENUOUS AT THE TIME, BUT HAS ITS PROMISE BEEN FULFILLED BY THE REAL THING? IN A WORD, YES — AND MAYBE THEN SOME.

PLAYSTATION 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER GUERRILLA GAMES
> RELEASE 2008

feature



■ Take enough fire, and the world will begin to fade to black and white, time will slow, and you'd best find cover



I wanted to time it right

There's a moment where you have to say, let people talk. People believe we can't deliver, that's fine," says game director Mathijs De Jonge. "And then there's the moment that we can take the camera away from the action and fly around." He emphasizes his point as he pauses the demo he's just begun to zoom out from the action and cruise the camera through the real-time scene that surrounds the characters. Not unlike in that infamous original trailer, a squad of hardened soldiers is on a floating platform assault craft as it careens through the clouds, headed for the ground. As he unpauses the game, we watch as a massive lightning bolt rips through another nearby assault craft and its occupants are scattered and lost in the chaos. On the ground, a firefight is already raging, and the real gameplay begins as the squad pushes its way towards the entrenched Helghast.

Killzone 2 continues the story of the original game, but with an almost completely new cast of characters and locations. The original game had the soldiers of the ISA defending the world of Vekta from the expansionistic attackers of the planet Helghan. In Killzone 2, the tables have turned, and you are part of an elite special forces squad called Legion at the vanguard of an assault on Helghan and its people. Along for the ride is your navy liaison, a man named Rico, which should ring some bells if you played through the original. Players will adopt the role of a new character by the name of Sev. In the mission we saw, the third in the game, a major assault has begun against the Helghast capital. A massive arc lightning gun is systematically gathering and then discharging the hostile electrical weather patterns of the planet, laying waste to the attacking ISA forces. This massive weapon is the team's

target, and to breach the enemy defenses. To do so, you'll take advantage of the exclusive combat system designed for Killzone 2. On a surface level, very little is profoundly different or innovative about the sequel's combat. Instead, the wow factor lies in how gorgeously and realistically those fights play out, how smooth the action is, and how well the game plays on the PlayStation 3, a console that has yet to see too many big name exclusive shooters. Specifically, Killzone 2 will have players juggling the now-standard two-weapon loadout. In our demo, we saw everything from assault rifles to an SMG and a powerful grenade launcher. A tap of one of the shoulder buttons will throw Sev against cover, while an adjustable lean allows you to peek out just far enough to paint your target. Lean out too far and the aggressive Helghast won't waste time in peppering you with their own fire, at which point you'll start to see the screen slowly fade to black and white while time slows as you near death. Hopefully, you'll be quicker on the trigger and take down your enemy first, which should give you the chance to watch the intricate death animations of the bad guys. "It's a system we call the hit-response system. What that is doing is, we've got a lot of mo-cap animations in, and for every hit where you hit them they'll display a different animation," senior producer Steven Ter Heide tells us. "Those are all blended, so you'll get different responses every time. It will never look the same." The realism that emerges is different from either traditional ragdoll animations or canned pre-animated slumps. Soldiers have any number of potential reactions to a hit – and every weapon you use against them has different impact physics, hitting with varying force and spread. We saw this system on display most prominently as



the team revealed another addition to the Killzone formula: bosses. While hurrying to the source of the lightning gun, Sev and his team encounter the Heavy, a shortened name for the heavy trooper of the Helghast army. This massive armored commando wields a mini-gun until you dive behind cover, at which point his favorite strategy changes to popping an explosive from his grenade launcher. When the beeping grenade lands nearby, Sev's cover is about to be annihilated, and so is he unless he runs for a new hiding place. Using the game's hit-response system, a well-aimed shot at the Heavy's head can potentially send him reeling back and to the side, revealing the exposed gas tank on his back. You know the rest of that story.

The game engine running Killzone 2 was created by the team specifically for this game. Its deferred rendering lighting allows for dramatic moods and effects as light sources move around within the world. As we notice later in the demo, destructible cover is also not a problem for the game's technology. At a bridge crossing between two buildings, Sev opens fire on a fully barred window, shattering its shutters and opening a new line of sight to the Helghast across the street. Simultaneously, those same soldiers start to fire back, rapidly eroding the walls holding back their fire, leaving Sev and his team exposed. In scenes like these, small graphical flourishes abound. Below the dim overhead light of the deserted building, moths flutter wildly. In the space between the two buildings, long metal cables shake in the wind and swing wildly from stray bullets. Lightning strikes a nearby structure, and electricity courses down its metal parts to the ground below. Strong tech built over the course of more than two years enables a world that is amazingly detailed and smoothly animated at 30 frames per second. As the team tells us, one character in Killzone 2 has as many polygons as an entire level of the first Killzone. "As far as the ambition for the original Killzone for PlayStation 2, we set the bar very high. We wanted to push the technology. The game was good, but there were certainly some things that could be improved upon," admits Guerrilla Games

CONTINUED ON PAGE 79

■ The Heavy is one of the early boss fights you'll have the pleasure of confronting



■ Destructible environments are taken to a whole new level with Killzone 2's remarkable game engine

■ The real-time demo we played more than did justice to the level of detail exhibited in the original trailer from two years ago

■ Using cover and flanking is essential to overcome the fearsome AI of the Helghast

■ You'll travel with a squad of characters, including a familiar face from the first game

« CONTINUED FROM PAGE 77

managing director Hermen Hulst. "And now there's a new platform with new possibilities. And we thought, how do we make the Killzone world come alive on this next-generation platform?"

We got the chance to feel just how alive that world already is when we played through this lengthy mission for ourselves. Controls feel remarkably smooth, a happy surprise given how poorly FPS has traditionally fared on Sony hardware. Instead, the traditional look feature on the right analog doesn't feel as jerky as in some first-person offerings. Consequently, aiming is straightforward and allows for targeted shots on enemy body parts, such as one bullet exchange where we fired a single round to knock off an enemy helmet, only to follow through with a lucky headshot. Most noticeable in the fights was the aggressive enemy AI,

which was quick to take advantage of our failings. If we let up on the covering fire, they would quickly flank into a better position. And, as we learned, running out of ammunition during a crucial firefight was tantamount to suicide, as the enemies seemed to notice and charged our location. As the mission came to a head, we found ourselves desperately firing away at some vulnerable ports on the lightning gun, while swarms of Helghast continually attacked from behind. If our experience is any indication, Killzone 2 won't be short on challenge when it releases next year.

The same team that's designing the single-player campaign is hard at work on a multiplayer component, but the team was reticent to reveal details so early on in the process. When we asked about cooperative gameplay, they held their ground and remained silent, but their smiles as they refused to answer were

just short of a confirmation.

It's hard to declare Killzone 2 an innovative success on a gameplay level, even though all the elements of a solid FPS are firmly in place. Instead, the triumph on display is a technical marvel, with amazingly detailed characters and gritty backgrounds that are easy to pause and marvel at. To our eyes, this early version of the game does justice to a promise that many in the industry thought was an impossible standard only two years ago. It's a testament to how fast the gaming world rolls forward. In the next few months, several other games are likely to set a new high bar for gamers' expectations, and only the release of this sequel will reveal if it's up to the challenge. One way or the other, even our brief hours with the game were enough to conclude that PS3 owners have at least one new triple-A title to call their own next year. ■ ■ ■



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Grand Theft Auto IV

> STYLE 1: PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR > DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR NORTH

CELL PHONES, APPOINTMENTS, AND ONE BIG ASS CITY

At the rate that Rockstar is releasing new information for Grand Theft Auto IV, you'd think that this game was shipping no earlier than 2009. As secretive as this company has been over this last year, you can only imagine our surprise when they stopped by the Game Informer offices for an impromptu hour-long gameplay session with the Xbox 360 version of the game.

Unlike our previous experience in Liberty City, which began in the borough of Broker, this one started with Niko, still dressed somewhat shoddily, standing calmly in the neon-lit and heavily populated streets of Star Junction (GTA IV's version of Times Square).

As the electronic billboards flickered with color and life, the denizens of the streets could be seen doing various things, such as buying a paper from a dispenser, or gathering on a street corner for a cigarette and a chat. No stidder for details, you can actually hear the flick of a lighter when someone lights up. It's elements like these that really make this city feel alive.

The demo itself started off fairly slowly, with Niko nonchalantly taking a stroll, but soon showcased a number of new innovations for the series, such as the ability to whistle and wave for a cab. In our demo, the first cab that Niko tried to flag didn't stop, which brought about a hilarious flip of the

bird from our Eastern-European protagonist. The second cab did pull over, however.

Rather than jacking it like you would in other GTA games, players now have the chance to hop into the back seat. From here, the game zooms into Niko's eyes with a first-person view showing the interior of the car, and a cabbie that is ready to get his marching orders. The player must first give the cabbie a location, which is handled on the d-pad. When the car starts moving, players have the option to hit the A button to skip the ride and be warped to the location, X to tell the cabbie to hurry it up (which is shown visually by the cabbie speeding up and punching the horn) and Y to exit the cab. The right

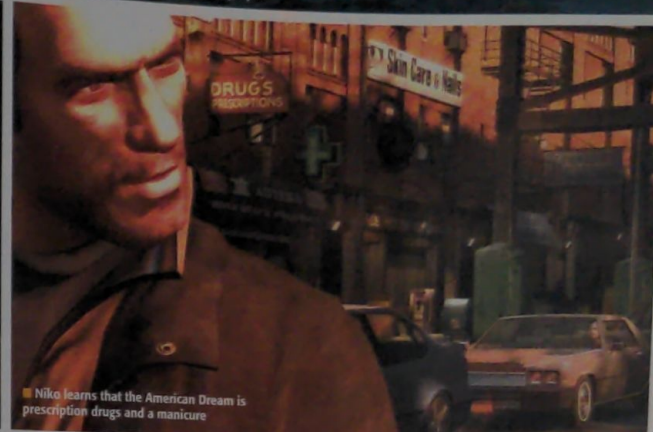
analog stick is used for camera movement, for which there are dozens of views.

After a nice ride through Liberty City, Niko hopped out of the car and made tracks into an alley where a contact, Little Jacob, who he contacted earlier on the phone, was waiting. The two parties exchanged pleasantries, then Jacob popped open his trunk to reveal a stockade of weapons. It was at this point that Rockstar pointed out that you have to build a relationship with Jacob throughout the course of the game before he will go out of his way to deal with you — especially in light of the fact that there will be no ammunition stores in the game.

What followed was a series of phone calls



Niko doesn't take kindly to bugs on windshields



Niko learns that the American Dream is prescription drugs and a manicure



Both helicopters and boats can be controlled by the player

and cab rides. The outcome of all this concluded with Niko taking on a mission to take out a lawyer named Goldberg (of Goldberg, Ligner, and Shyster). Since Goldberg is hard to get to, Niko chose a non-lethal approach to get to him. He was going to apply for a job at the law firm. The quickest way to do this was to hit the closest TW@ Internet Café — a place loaded with people huddled around glowing monitors. As Rockstar pointed out, every computer in the game can be interacted with. In this instance, Niko booted up a web browser, surfed a news and link heavy page, then went to the law firm's site where he submitted a resume.

This brings up another huge aspect of GTA

IV. Unlike previous games in the series, this one now has a working calendar, which is broken down into actual days of the week. After Niko's application was reviewed, he received a telephone call from the firm, who in turn, set up an appointment with him for Thursday at noon.

In preparation for this event, Niko purchased a chocolate brown suit from a top-tier clothing store called Perseus. The clothing changes in this GTA won't be fantastical, and are used in realistic ways. At the law firm, Niko was escorted to Goldberg's office. After taking a seat, the interview began. As Goldberg chatted it up, Niko stood up and pulled a gun on him. This

action was met with a hilarious response on Goldberg's part. He said that the firm supported the second amendment, and that "Guns don't kill people. Video games do."

With one quick shot, Goldberg flipped backward out of his chair and through a window, falling several stories to his death. This, of course, brought about a police firefight and chase. While still making use of a wanted star system (up to six stars), the police now have a search radius, which is represented on the map with a glowing ring — the more severe the crime, the larger the ring. It's up to the player to figure out how to get out of this zone. Do you change vehicles? Hide? Try and outrun them? It's

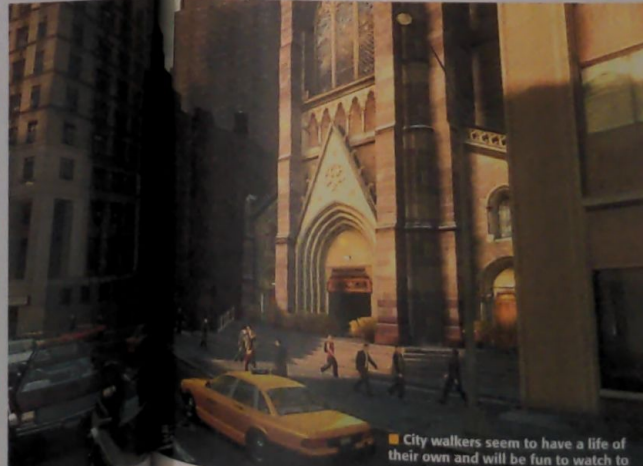
now more of a game of cat and mouse.

Rockstar wouldn't go into the specifics regarding how the controls work, but did show us some tasty firefights, with Niko ducking behind cover (which, depending on the material, could be destructible), and exchanging fire. When the odds leaned in the favor of the police, Niko switched to an uz to show off a new move: blind firing over objects.

The demo ended with Niko going down in a hail of fire. It was an awesome run, and it made us want more answers, such as why would there be a multiplayer option on the phone during the single-player game? Does this imply co-op? ■■■



The cell phone is to arrange meetings with ammo sellers, friends, and people that have missions for you to complete



City walkers seem to have a life of their own and will be fun to watch to see what they do



Objects in mirror are always smaller than they appear, except for guns. They always look huge!

■ The Master Chief and the Arbiter fight side by side in the new game



XBOX 360

Halo 3

► STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
► PUBLISHER MICROSOFT ► DEVELOPER BUNGIE ► RELEASE SEPTEMBER 25

BEYOND MULTIPLAYER

Until E3 this year, Bungie was remaining tight-lipped on the single-player options for its sure-to-break-sales-records release, Halo 3. The extensive playable demo we were shown revealed the game to be in fantastic shape, which did nothing but heighten our expectations for the September release. We also got to see just how sweet the new film-saving functionality will be, a feature that promises to have gamers watching their own sessions with the same relish that they played them with.

The single-player demo we saw revealed a wealth of cool information, not the least of which is that those complaints about the graphics ought to start slowing down. While the game still maintains the artistic style of the first two Halo releases, the single-player component of the third game is flush with detail, from the gorgeous texturing of leaves and tree bark to the armor on Covenant soldiers. We also saw several moments that revealed the Master Chief fighting side-by-side with the Arbiter, which begs the question of whether two co-op players will each pick one of the heroes — it seems likely, but is still unconfirmed.

The forested area through which this level played out was full of Covenant troops, and the Master Chief seemed to be at the forefront of a marine force taking them out while en route to a meet-up with Sgt. Johnson. With constant chatter pouring in from all sides, it's easy to get drawn into the battle. Your troops are constantly shouting back and forth with each other, while Brutes threaten your life and Grunts scream their high-pitched silliness. The mission soon found MC by a riverside, where the rendezvous with Johnson was put on hiatus thanks to his Pelican crashing into a distant ravine. Instead, a huge Covenant Phantom showed up over the river.

Grabbing a turret from the shore, the Master Chief opened up with the powerful weapon. And yes, you'll finally be able to take those suckers down.

The other major focus for Bungie at E3 was on revealing more about their save film feature. It's hard to believe that this might be something you'd spend a lot of time on until you see it in action. Unlike the version that came with the multiplayer beta, this iteration of the software had all its advanced features included. Any level or match from either single or multiplayer can be input into the filming tool, at which point you gain total control of the camera, pulling it up and out from your character's perspective, spinning it around him, zooming over the map, or switching between other players' perspectives. You can pause the action at any time, and rotate the camera around for a better look, or watch that Warthog your friend was driving get blown up again and again, in frame-by-frame clicks. You can also record clips, large or small, which will maintain your unique camera view as you record, and those clips can then become shareable on Xbox Live. Imagine the possibilities.

One of our favorite parts of Halo, the music, still hadn't been dropped in for the demo we saw. Likewise, the single-player action, insane as it was, was just a gameplay drop in the bucket compared to some large-scale vehicle sections that apparently occur later in the game. Nonetheless, everything we saw of Halo 3 was in tip-top shape. The surprise with this game isn't going to be if it does well — it's going to be how many sales records it manages to shatter. ■ ■ ■



■ Vehicle combat will figure prominently in the latter part of the campaign



■ The graphics have come a long way since the multiplayer beta earlier this year



previews



■ The new film-saving feature will let you pause at awesome moments like this, pan the camera around the action, and even record the clip for inclusion on Xbox Live



■ Vamp and Raiden display superhuman abilities as they fight. These two aren't the only familiar faces – the character art below depicts a 70-something Eva

PLAYSTATION 3

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > RELEASE Q1 2008

THE SNAKE'S OUT OF THE BAG

Fans of the Metal Gear franchise have become accustomed to jaw-dropping trailers at E3, and this year was no exception. We were treated to a cinematic clash between Raiden and Vamp, yet as usual, no specifics regarding the gameplay. Thankfully, that was rectified a week later when Konami threw a party for Metal Gear's 20th birthday and Hideo Kojima gave a demonstration of Guns of the Patriots in action.

The concepts we've been hearing about for two years have finally fallen into place. Throughout the course of the demo, Snake uses his Solid Eye as both binoculars and thermal goggles, lobs grenades while lying on his back, and sneaks around in barrel (which is more resilient than, say, a cardboard box). Otacorn's Metal Gear Mk. II will also figure prominently into recon, since Snake can control it remotely (with an in-game Sixaxis controller, no less) to scope out an area and shock unsuspecting troops. All of these were actions were illustrated in gameplay, not just as in-game cinematics.

"No place to hide" has been one of the game's driving principles, which Kojima has explained refers to the notion of staying concealed in an open battlefield. The key to stealth in MGS 4 is the octocam, which is built into Snake's sneaking suit. Using an interface like MGS 3's, you can select specific camo patterns to blend in to the environ-

ment. In one case, Snake wore a design that made him to look like a statue, allowing him to stand still as a patrol passed by. Even cooler is the fact that, with the touch of a button, players will be able to make the sneaking suit take on the colors and patterns of its surroundings chameleon-style.

In addition to the camo, there are other elements that resemble features in previous installments. For instance, Snake still seems able to keep a boundless arsenal with him at all times, which is selected through scrolling

menus in the lower corners of the screen. CQC makes a return as well, and though it will have new functionality (like disarming opponents), we have yet to see if the control scheme has been tweaked.

These mechanics are undoubtedly just the beginning. Sure, we've gotten a taste of what the game will be like, but Kojima is known for keeping secrets right up until a game's release. We're betting that there are still plenty of details hidden from view. ■ ■ ■

ANNIVERSARY GIFTS

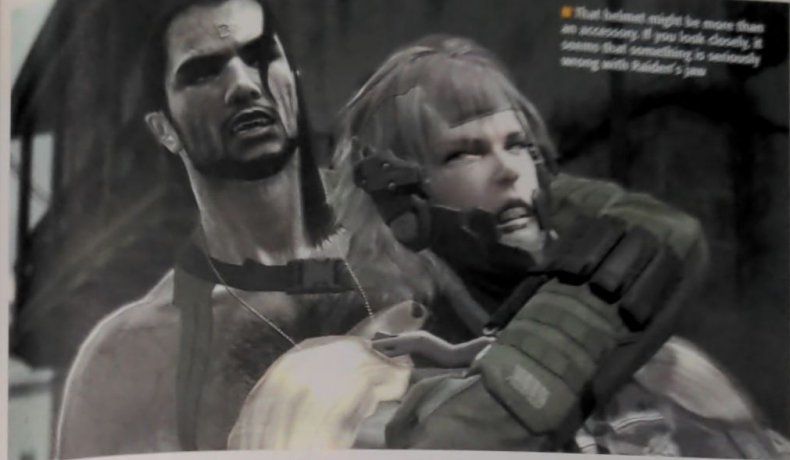
Since 2007 is the 20th anniversary of the series, Konami has announced a few additional Metal Gear titles to mark the occasion. A UMD graphic novel of Metal Gear Solid 2 is on the way from the same artist who did the first one and the cutscenes in Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops. Speaking of MGS: PO, Kojima Productions is releasing an expansion pack to the original, entitled Portable Ops+, that will

feature new stages, missions, and characters – including Roy Campbell, Raiden, and Old Snake. Finally, Metal Gear Online is in the works for PlayStation 3, an online counterpart to Metal Gear Solid 4 that brings the game's mechanics to a versus setting. As of this printing, Hideo Kojima has not confirmed whether this standalone title will be in addition to online play in MGS 4 or a substitute for it.

■ Portable Ops+



■ Metal Gear Online



■ That helmet might be more than an accessory. If you look closely, it seems that something is seriously wrong with Raiden's jaw



■ In the years since Metal Gear Solid 2, Snake's genetic condition has caused him to age unusually fast



■ Snake's octocam can take on complex patterns, allowing him to get the jump on foes



■ Which one of these could be Snake? Hint: he's one of the two with a head



■ Meryl returns as the leader of a newly formed FOXHOUND unit



■ We think the circle surrounding Snake indicates the environment his suit will use to create camouflage



Dark Elves and High Elves hate each other...duh!



The Dark Elf Black Guard sizes up the new volcano stage



The new Orc and Goblin army readies a siege



New Dark Elf Cold Knights never get off those lizard things



White Lions vs. Black Guards

XBOX 360

Warhammer: Battle March

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI > DEVELOPER BLACK HOLE ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SPRING 2008

JOINING THE CONSOLE MIGRATION

Last year's Warhammer: Mark of Chaos is taking up a new moniker and joining The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II and Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars in the growing RTS march towards Xbox 360. While the aforementioned titles have survived the transition from mouse and keyboard mostly intact, Namco Bandai hopes to raise the bar. "There have been some precedents set by games that have made a great effort in implementing effective and intuitive controls in the genre on the Xbox 360," says developer Black Hole Entertainment's chief creative officer, Jamie Macdonald. "Battle March will have these standard offerings for players who may have become used to thrash controls, but we offer something more in-depth as well." Players can choose a more advanced control

set that the team describes as "faster and slicker." Instead of simply functioning as mercenaries for hire as in Mark of Chaos, the brutish orcs and goblins now have their own full-blown army. Players will command this force in an all-new single-player campaign, titled Orcs and Goblins, that will join the original two from the PC game. "The new campaign offers some very interesting maps that aren't what I would call typical of any war game," says Ngui. "This will bring a refreshing variety that is very different from the initial Empire and Chaos campaigns."

Fans of the High Elf army have a chance to go a little sinister this time around with the new Dark Elves. Though they won't have their own campaign, Namco assures us that the Dark Elf army is definitely worth getting to know. "Players favoring this army will have a lot of options," Ngui says. "Magic, speed, and range are all available depending on how players would like to build their army."

Multiplayer mode will allow the same level of army customization as Mark of Chaos, and will feature standard kill-or-be-killed matches, siege mode, and reinforcements mode (where players capture strategic points for battlefield advantages). Developer Black Hole is not talking about the new multiplayer modes just yet, but new Xbox 360-only maps have been confirmed.

The team assures that it is listening to some of the general criticisms of the original PC title in the creation of Battle March. "We've definitely been keeping abreast with input from consumers and press," Ngui says. "There have been a lot of meetings between all parties to address what we can do to make the experience even stronger on the Xbox 360. In the end, I believe we will have a game that surpasses the original Mark of Chaos experience that people will have a lot of fun with." ■ ■ ■

DON'T JUST RIP UP THE TRACK. TEAR IT A NEW ONE.



Actual in-game screenshot.

GeoDeformation™ is here—an earth-pulverizing technology that makes each lap more torn up than the last. Other games have promised it, but Sega Rally Revo delivers. Combine that with a slew of erratic weather conditions and track surfaces, and you'll never know what's around the bend. Check out the groundbreaking off-road racing at www.sega.com/segarally.

SEGA RALLY REVO

COMING OCTOBER 2007

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.



XBOX 360 LIVE

Games for Windows

Available on PLAYSTATION 3 computer entertainment system and the PSP (PlayStation® Portable) system.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Skate

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA BLACK BOX > **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

THE NEW SEARCH FOR ANIMAL CHIN

When you think about Skate in relation to real-life skating — instead of in comparison to its rival Tony Hawk — you get a better appreciation of what the game is trying to accomplish. Skate's attempt to come up with a control scheme and feel more akin to real skating is a breath of fresh air in the genre, and helps the game stand on its own two feet. Though it's in a totally different genre, Skate's control scheme is similar to Assassin's Creed in that some of the buttons correspond to areas of the body. The right and left triggers initiate grabs, while the X and B buttons are your left and right feet, respectively. The analog sticks, which control direction and how you tweak your board, have a good deal of range to them. So holding a manual, for instance, has a really natural feel; it's not like you just jam the thumbstick forward and back. Because of this subtlety, the game has a flow to it that captures the feeling of skating down the street pulling tricks. Of course, this also means

the game's learning curve can be a little steep as you work out the nuances of the system. However, it's one we're excited to learn and explore. In the hands-on demo we experienced, we cruised through the streets of San Vanelona. Sometimes we bombed hills and skated through speed wobbles (although you can adjust your trucks to your liking), other times we camped on a skate spot like a city park or in front of an office building. The whole demo seemed very much like a normal skate video, right down to the camera work. We even saw the mega-park that Danny Way is building for real in Hawaii. The masonite behemoth takes up a big chunk of real estate and proves that Skate isn't short on death-defying feats. Although Skate doesn't seem to feature as many tricks or the general craziness of Tony Hawk, it also doesn't have you running around on foot as a link between tricks. That could make all the difference in the world. ■ ■ ■



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XBOX 360 LIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER NAUGHTY DOG > RELEASE NOVEMBER

BURIED TREASURE

Without a doubt, Sony has high hopes that Uncharted will have the right formula to rise to the top in the busy holiday season ahead, a tough task for even the most hardened adventurer. Nathan Drake may have the goods, if the game can be smoothed out and some targeting issues addressed in the next couple of months. For our part, the game looks positively stunning, and if there's anyone that we're willing to trust on the promised sweeping story, it's the folks over at Naughty Dog.

In brief, the supposed descendant of Sir Francis Drake, Nathan Drake, is on a treasure hunt to find his ancestor's hidden treasure. Like so many great adventure stories, things

get complicated quickly. Between the presence of a long-time mentor with a shady background, an attractive girl who comes along for the ride, and an overwhelming force of baddies out for the same objective, Nathan should have his hands full.

On display at E3 were several new areas. One had Drake precariously hanging from a cliff as he swung back and forth on vines, desperately seeking a solid handhold. We also saw him scramble along windowsills in an ascent of a ruined watchtower on the mysterious island that is the setting for much of the game. Combat continues to progress, and we enjoyed checking out the melee component, which wasn't in the game the last time we got to play.

Targeting with guns remains a little bit iffy, and enemy reactions both in gameplay terms and animations could use a little work. Meanwhile, Drake's own movement animations are amazing, as he vaults between rocks and over fallen pedestals. Though not on display at E3, the team at Naughty Dog is still planning to implement some exciting diversions in the gameplay as well, with a big focus on the excitement of chase scenes, whether in a jeep or on powerful jet skis.

Cinematic scenes emulate the style of

some of the great action/adventure epics, and we noticed some tweaks to Drake's female companion, Elena, not the least of which was a switch to blonde hair that had a lot more life to it than before. Meanwhile, the banter between her and Drake remains entertaining and believable. Overall, a feeling of fun and excitement permeates everything we've seen of Uncharted. We can't wait to see how the final product comes together later this year. ■ ■ ■



■ While the easy comparison with this game is to Tomb Raider, some E3 showgoers compared the action to Gears of War.



■ The gameplay in Uncharted jumps between platforming and stealth moments into movie-like explosions of action.



■ See those mountains in the background? Think of this Burnout like you did Gears: if you can see it, you can probably drive to it.

PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360

Burnout Paradise

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK AND XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER EA > DEVELOPER CRITERION GAMES > RELEASE JANUARY 9

FREEBURN

It's always fun to watch a high-speed ride crash and burn, leaving a smoldering wreck of what was once beautiful. And we're not just talking about Lindsay Lohan's life; we're talking about cars. For some reason there aren't too many things more fun than causing – or even surviving – high-speed disasters, and that is why we love the Burnout series.

With Paradise, the first Burnout made from the ground up for next-gen platforms, developer Criterion wanted to make a fresh start. They wanted a Burnout that would do away with all the loading screens and menus. To accomplish this goal they've introduced an open world environment called Paradise City. Races and other favorite Burnout events like Takedown are still present, but all you will have to do to access them is drive to the starting line.

■ If the sides of these screens look blurry to you, you either need glasses or you need to slow down.



IT'S SHOWTIME

Considering the open world aspect of the game, Criterion found it a challenge to create congested crash junction areas all over the city. But since Crash Mode is many players' favorite mode, what was a developer to do? How about turn Crash Mode into a crash anytime mode and call it Showtime. In Paradise, players will be able to initiate crashes on their own anywhere in the city, even during race events, and as long as their car retains momentum, they can continue to rack up the points. It might even be possible to keep one wreck going from one side of the city all the way to the other. Sounds like destruction even Godzilla could be proud of.



■ Cars now have e-brakes, so making quick U-turns is a breeze.

In addition, there will be various shops scattered across the city. Drive through a body shop and it will repair any damage to your car. Drive through a gas station and your boost meter fills up. Tired of your car's color? Take a drive through a paint shop. We took the new city for a spin and were having a blast for about 15 minutes when we realized that we hadn't yet entered a single event. Screwing around and exploring the game's open world is pretty fun on its own. This freeform fun continues in the online arena. While playing single player, invite some of your friends to join, and your pervasive world seamlessly merges with theirs. You'll never see a load screen or pause. Online you can tag your friends for takedowns, and if you're successful in making them crash (and you have a camera peripheral) the game will take a picture of your gloating pose and send it to them. But be careful, because players who have been taken down earn a payoff – giving them the opportunity to reverse your steering, lock up your brakes, or some other trick to get a revenge crash.

With all these changes, it's clear that this is Burnout evolved. All the different cars actually feel and handle differently, and their various weights and balance will alter how they react with the environment, resulting in vastly different crashes for each car every time. We can't wait to try and see how many different wrecks we can make; we just wish we didn't have to wait until next year to do it. ■ ■ ■

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

MX vs. ATV Untamed

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIICONNECT24, UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER RAINBOW STUDIOS > RELEASE JANUARY

HAULIN' IT

MX vs. ATV series developer Rainbow Studios is well known for its racing prowess, and at first glance Untamed seems not much different from other titles in this excellent franchise. But MX vs. ATV fans should be able to detect some subtle differences that set Untamed apart.

First off, the game embraces an open career format, which we're thankfully seeing more and more these days. The X-Cross career mode

lets you play to your strengths and preferences when racing towards the championship, although in the final stretch you will have to participate in a variety of race types. One of the newbies for his year is Endurocross, which takes place outdoors but has some of the characteristics of the tighter, more intense indoor supercross tracks. Also added is Untamed's Opencross mode, which lets players race through the series' open world areas. These won't be like your typical waypoint races, instead letting you maneuver and explore the map.

Rainbow has refined its physics-based racing model with two kinds of pre-load. More importantly, the AI on the game's tracks will veer away from the best-line racing that has so typified racing AI in the past. Worry not, MX fans, we're pretty sure that the tweaks being made for Untamed will only make you like the series more. ■ ■ ■



XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

The Bourne Conspiracy

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SIERRA > DEVELOPER HIGH MOON STUDIOS > RELEASE SUMMER 2008

STILL-BOURNE OR RE-BOURNE?

The Bourne series is the latest summer blockbuster franchise to get its due with a video game counterpart. Thankfully, the game is not being created simultaneously with a film, so the development team can take the time necessary to execute the game correctly.

The team in question is High Moon Studios, best known for its well-received occult western Darkwatch. Unfortunately, High Moon is tackling Robert Ludlum's espionage series without the help of film star Matt Damon. That's not to say the team is going it alone, however. High Moon is working closely with the Ludlum estate and hired screenwriter Tony Gilroy and stunt coordinator Jeff Imada, both of whom worked on the highly successful films.

The Bourne Conspiracy will take place right before the start of The Bourne Identity, giving gamers the chance to explore Jason Bourne's life before he loses his identity and becomes a malfunctioning \$30 million killing machine.

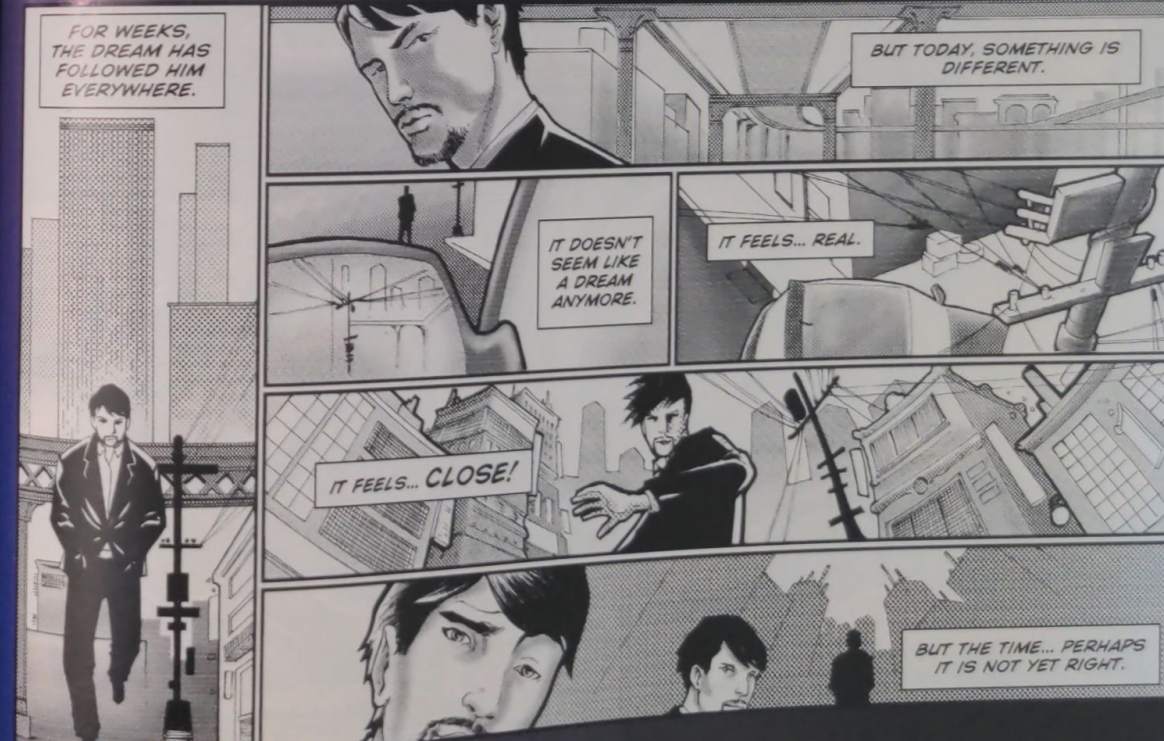
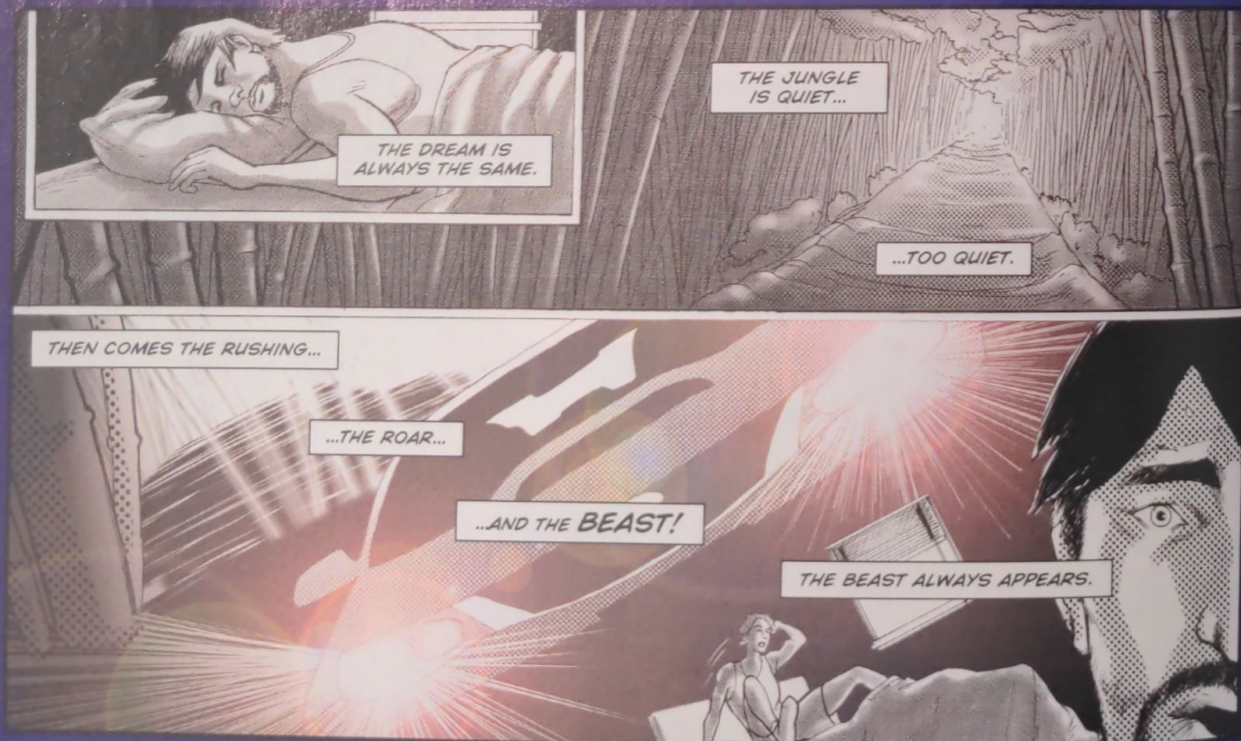
The game will explore his past through a series of flashbacks, and some of the more exciting scenes from the first movie will also make appearances, including the famed embassy escape.

Unlike espionage games like Splinter Cell and Metal Gear Solid, The Bourne Conspiracy relies more upon action sequences than stealth. Given that Jason Bourne can kill everyone in the room six ways from Sunday, the game will seamlessly move between carefully choreographed close-combat action and frantic gunplay. Bourne doesn't have access to any Bond-like super secret spy technology, either. Instead, he relies on his superior training and instinct, which gamers can tap into using "Bourne Awareness." This feature slows down time and allows you to scan the environment for potential weapons.

The Bourne Conspiracy is scheduled to release in Summer 2008. We hope the team can overcome the loss of the series' star and accurately recreate the excitement of the films. ■ ■ ■

Jason Bourne may not remember his past, but he does remember that wool sweaters look great in gunfights

Matt Damon has been replaced with Steve from accounting



XBOX 360

Fable 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER LIONHEAD STUDIOS > RELEASE 2008

THE SOUND OF WAR

Death in computer games is something that hasn't changed since the start," says Fable's creator, Peter Molyneux. "Death has always been used to give tension to the combat." In Fable 2, Molyneux and his team at Lionhead Studios are exploring what combat would be like without the lurking fear of death. Rather than meeting the reaper and having to restart a battle, when you sustain enough damage in Fable 2, your character will likely collapse to the ground, where he will be thoroughly beaten by his adversaries. This will lead to your character earning a new scar or wound.

This may not sound like such a bad thing, but your appearance and how grotesque it could be will affect your relationships. People will run away scared, your wife may grow distant, and as Molyneux pointed out, your son may even scream, "Daddy! Ah!" This should make the combat more intense, as it will have a permanent mark on the progression of the game.

Fable 2 is also breaking ground with its combat. "All of the sword fighting takes place on this blue button," comments Molyneux. True enough, tapping X and applying directional presses with it will perform different an array of

attacks, such as standard sword swings, picking up and throwing items, and also contextual strikes, like smashing an opponent's head into a wall. Ranged combat will be handled on the Y button, and magic will be designated to B.

It may sound like the combat system is being streamlined and simplified, but it's actually growing in an unexpected way. Rather than just hammering away on X to down foes, Lionhead hopes that the combat will bring music to the ears of the players. Quite literally, in fact - every sword slice in Fable 2 adds to the soundtrack. Battles start out silent, but if you rhythmically time your swings with the tempo, more instruments will be added to the score. The better your timing, the more powerful your attacks.

To no surprise, Molyneux says that he drew inspiration for this mechanic from the PS2 game Rez. Sadly, Molyneux wasn't open to talking about the faithful dog that will travel at your side, but did say that this pup's AI surpasses anything seen in a game before. Fable 2's release date is still up in the air, and given Lionhead's track record, it isn't even safe assuming it will come out in 2008. 2008



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

WWE Smackdown! vs. Raw 2008

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER YUKES MEDIA CREATIONS > RELEASE NOVEMBER 15

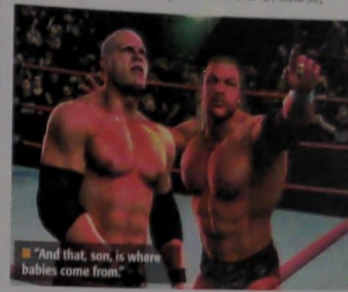
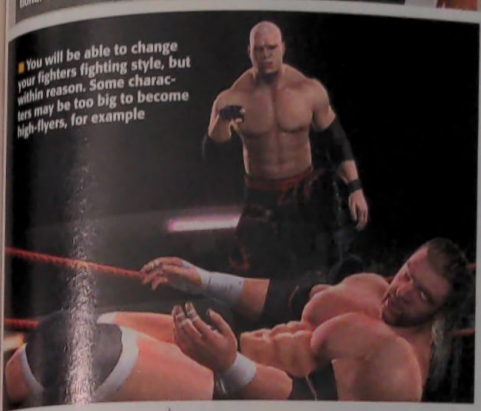
NOT A SLAP FIGHT

THQ really wants people to know that in this year's WWE title every brawler fights differently. The game is coming packed with eight different fighting styles, and every wrestler will be equipped with two of them: a primary and a secondary. A fighter's primary ability dictates what kind of super move they have. These are moves that other wrestlers won't have, and range from abilities like becoming temporarily invulnerable to unleashing attacks that are impossible for the other fighters to avoid. Of course,

you will also be able to switch between your primary and secondary abilities during a match, effectively changing your special move.

Also new to this year's entry is 24/7 Mode, which combines GM and Season mode from past titles. In this mode, your goal is to become a legend. There will be sub-goals on this journey, such as winning the World Rumble or Wrestlemania, gaining titles, or getting ranked as one of the Power 25. Becoming a legend might take longer depending on if you are playing as an already established superstar or an unknown newcomer, but it's possible either way. You will also have daily activities in this mode where you manage your fighter's health, popularity, etc. just like in past GM modes.

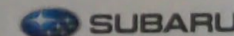
This year's WWE promises to have its fair share of thrills. Crowds will be more interactive this time around. They will offer you weapons and may even step forward to help hold down your opponent. With faster gameplay, smoother animations, and some improved analog stick moves, this sounds like it might be one of the most promising wrestling titles in a long time. ■ ■ ■

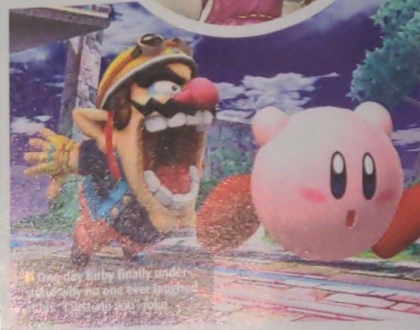


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Wii

Super Smash Bros. Brawl

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER HALLOFAMMATIONS INC. > RELEASE DATE 12/1/08

TURN THIS FIGHT INTO AN ALL OUT BRAWL

The sequel to the GameCube's biggest selling title continues to look better. When we saw Bowser kick Mario's tiny frame across the screen at Nintendo press conference, a small tear of joy crawled down our cheek. But details continue to slowly trickle out for what will most likely be Nintendo's biggest game this year, so we're mopping up all the details we can find and squeezing out every last drop of information.

Just because what you have seen so far in this Smash Bros. looks similar to past titles, don't go assuming that all the characters will perform just as they did before. Many of the fighters have learned some new moves since the previous games. Zelda, for example, now has less of an emphasis on physical attacks and relies even more strongly on magic, while Bowser will be an even bigger powerhouse, able to transform into the monstrously terrifying Giga Bowser.

But the newcomers have plenty of tricks of their own. Kid Icarus hero Pit has a two-handed bladed weapon that can be separated into a blade for each hand. Players will also be able to control the trajectory of light arrows fired from his bow. Zero Suit Samus has a strong emphasis on speed, and the Paralyzer weapon she holds can transform into a whip, giving her deadly range.

No matter which character you choose, they will all be able to call in secondary fighters with an Assist Trophy. Assist Trophies are items that summon other cameo characters into the battle for a short time. These assist characters are invincible and random, so you never know who you will end up with. It could be a Hammer Bro, Captain Falcon's rival Samurai Goroh, Dr. Wright from SimCity, or any number of other special guest stars.

Still, some of the coolest features are the levels that

change during play. The Yoshi's Island stage has a revolving seasonal system that goes through spring, summer, fall, and winter even while the battle rages on. We've also seen a Bridge of Eldin level from The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. Every once in a while, King Bulbin appears to lob bombs onto the bridge, causing the ground to fall out from underfoot. Even the Animal Crossing stage has a day-night cycle set by the Wii's internal clock. It's been hinted that there will be special events on certain levels during specific days and times.

With all we've seen so far, the new Smash Bros. is definitely shaping up to be one of the biggest games this holiday. And we're pretty sure that there is a lot more information to come, like a full character list, different modes of play, etc. But until December 3rd, we'll just have to happily feast on whatever crumbs Nintendo feeds us. ■■■

STRIP TEASE

As you can see, certain moves will have a lasting effect on characters. Here Samus charges up a mega blast, which is incredibly devastating, but comes at a price. The blast destroys her power suit, making her Zero Suit Samus. At least she can use the pieces of her suit as a weapon by throwing them at her opponents.



Wii

Super Mario Galaxy

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE NOVEMBER 12

SPACE JUMP

When some strange creature kidnaps Princess Peach and escapes into outer space, Mario's Bowser-sense starts tingling and he takes to the skies to rescue her. After all, it's a plumber's job to save a Princess. But enough about the game's story; you're not reading this because you want to know a detailed plot synopsis for the new Mario game. We've actually played Galaxy and you probably want to know what we think.

In Galaxy, stages are separated by, uh, well galaxies. Each galaxy has its own theme, and level diversity is as vast as you'd expect from a Mario game. During our brief time with the demo we fought a plant boss, hummed down some rabbits and explored a pirate ship, floating in space. One of our favorite levels in the Star Dust Galaxy

centers on a gravity well that pulls in space debris, thereby creating new ground for Mario to walk on. It's like a level that builds itself while you play.

Mario has never been afraid to put on an animal costume, and it looks like nothing has changed with Galaxy. On one level Mario



came in contact with a black and gold mushroom that transformed him into a honeybee-suited Mario. As you can tell from the screen above he looks a little dorky, but he's also granted some highly useful abilities. Bee Mario is able to fly upwards for short periods of time, he can hover atop of flowers that wouldn't normally take his weight, and he can climb up things like honeycombs. However, apparently Nintendo thinks water is Bee kryptonite, because if Mario comes

in contact with any H₂O he will lose all his Bee powers.

Co-op is done with an interesting twist in Galaxy. A second player can grab an extra Wii remote and assist Mario by taking control of the floating star pointer that accompanies Mario. This accomplice will be able to do a variety of things, such as hold down enemies or stun them (making it easier for Mario to finish them off), collect floating star gems, and even destroy certain obstacles such as boulders. This is a unique twist to the gameplay, but we're hoping it gets a little bit deeper before the game releases.

Nintendo says this is the closest to the classic Mario 64 a Mario title has ever been. Sure, the controls are smooth, and Mario still has his familiar triple jump set, but by just looking at screens it's hard to believe their claim. The spread out nature of the levels and outer space atmosphere don't evoke many classic Mario feelings. However, when you actually play the game you begin to understand a little bit of Nintendo's genius.

The small planetary structure in Galaxy actually frees Nintendo to create fun platforming challenges without worrying how they connect to the rest of the level. Don't worry—Mario's still got it, and the whole galaxy will know it when the game launches this November. ■■■



■ Bartman? Is it 1990 again?



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | DS

The Simpsons Game

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER VUOLTA & GUNN > RELEASE WINTER

S-M-R-T

When you think about it, it doesn't really make sense to have the Simpsons skateboarding around or spray-painting objects to fend off aliens. The long-running television show has always been about satire and social commentary – something that Simpsons games have failed to capture in the past. That's the area where the newest adaptation hopes to turn things around. Chock full of humor and Springfield's myriad cast of weirdoes, The Simpsons Game is finally putting

the show's characters in their element. The story finds the Simpson family zapped into a video game. They are aware of their status as characters within a game, and the development team at EA is using this as an opportunity to lampoon the major icons of the industry. Marge uses her megaphone to crusade against the violence in Grand Theft Scratchy, and Kratos' God of Wharf seafood products are a culinary sensation. Whenever you run into a tired gaming convention, like an obvious weak

point on a rampaging Lard Lad, a screen appears with Comic Book Guy calling out the cliché.

Of course, there needs to be some kind of vehicle to deliver these moments, and that's where the gameplay comes in. Returning to a beat 'em up style, The Simpsons Game has you roving around Springfield in a variety of scenarios, busting up bad guys and solving puzzles. The inclusion of a co-op mode means that you and a buddy will be able to tackle these challenges together,

since each stage has two participating family members (you just switch between them if you're playing by yourself).

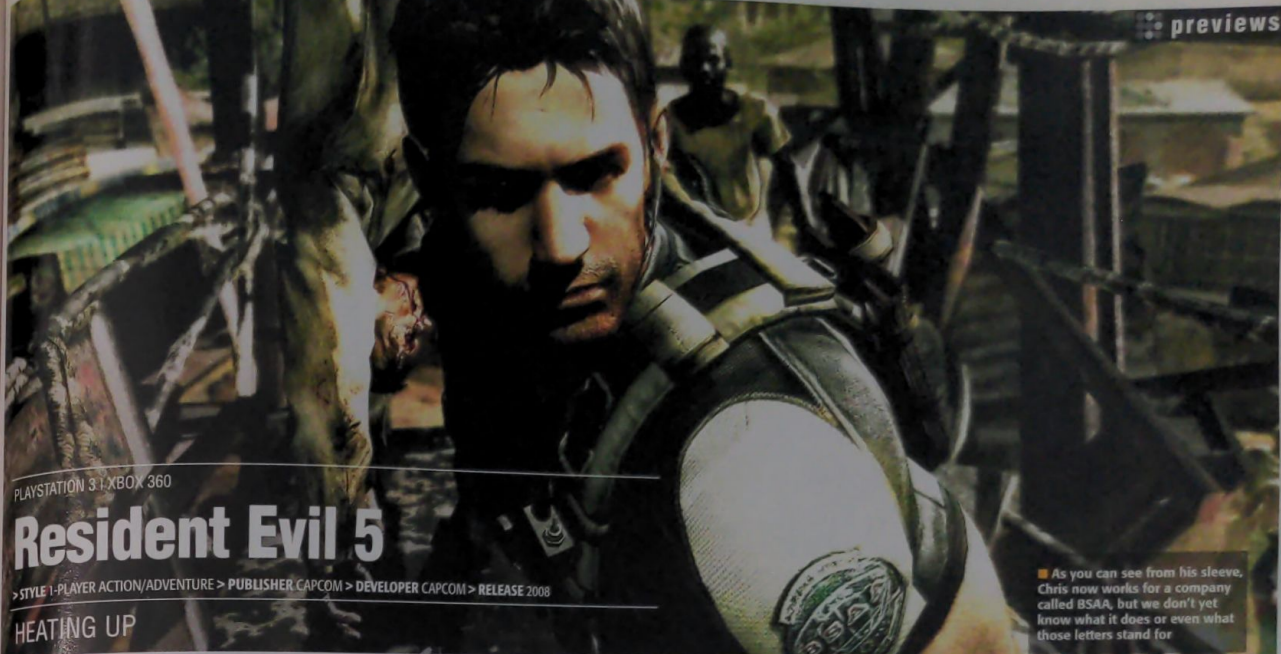
The Simpsons Game's release will coincide with that of The Simpsons Movie on home video formats later this year. Until then, it couldn't hurt to watch some old episodes to brush up on your quotes and memorable moments. Screw Flanders. ■ ■ ■

The self-referential streak that has distinguished The Simpsons in its 18 years on television will run through the game as well. The dev team has clearly done its research, drawing upon material that seasoned veterans might even find obscure. Some characters that were relegated to single Halloween episodes (like the bloodthirsty dolphins) make prominent appearances, and you can expect to see nods to the Fighting Hellfish, faulty Krusty-branded merchandise, and gummi Venus de Milo. Matt Groening, the series creator, will even appear as a boss. We're still keeping our fingers crossed for a Lee Carvallo's Putting Challenge minigame!

"OH, I'VE WASTED MY LIFE"



■ If you look past the attacking dolphins, you'll see a "God of Wharf" advertisement



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Resident Evil 5

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 2008

HEATING UP

You weave your way through a darkened alley, on the run from someone – something – terrible. Infected humans. Not zombies, not Los Ganados, not like any monsters you've faced before. An enemy too numerous to fight. You run out into the light, and your corneas have to adjust to an over-saturated world. The heat is stifling. Not everything is scarier in the dark. Out of fear and heat, your palms begin to sweat. If you stay out here too long it will affect you physically; aiming will become difficult and your movement will grow tired. This place is driving you insane, and you're not the only one. Welcome to Resident Evil 5.

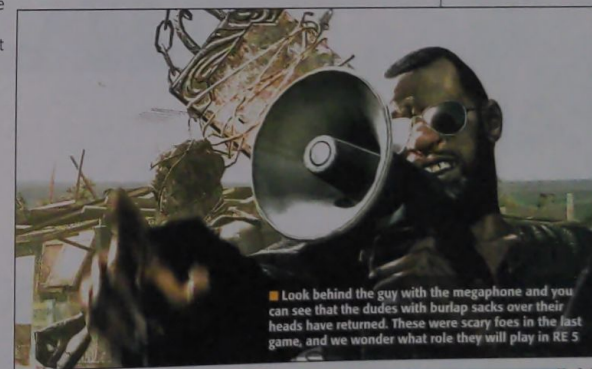
Producer Jun Takeuchi has stated that the movie *Black Hawk Down* served as inspiration for the game, and one look at the dilapidated village homes and the onrushing militant crowds is like watching that inspiration in action. The world of RE 5 is alive with violence. Villagers rush a decrepit bus where a few have taken refuge. The infected bleed out of their eyes and nose. And one large enemy takes out a building's supporting strut with a single swing of his axe.

The environments are gorgeously haunting. An unsettling chant echoes in the distance as main character Chris Redfield stands alone in the middle of a rural village. Trash wafts slowly in the breeze while two crows circle what is otherwise a ghost town. This isn't a

Colorado mountain town or some farming village, this is the desert. Takeuchi has also talked about how body temperature will play an important role in the game. Exposure to extreme heat will affect how Chris performs, and may even cause hallucinations. RE 5's setting, and its extreme contrasts between light and dark, are meant to evoke a sense that the world has gone crazy.

RE 5's gameplay looks like a clear evolution of RE 4's, and you can't blame Capcom for not mixing it up too much when that

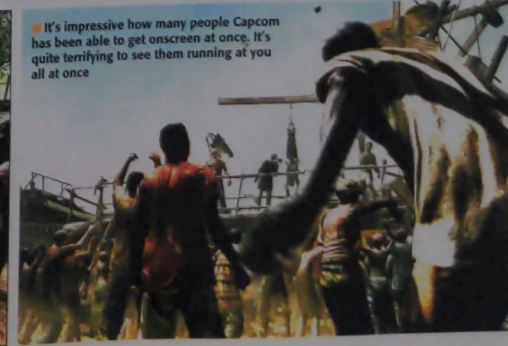
■ These guys are so aggressive they won't even let your spirit go towards the light



■ Look behind the guy with the megaphone and you can see that the dudes with burlap sacks over their heads have returned. These were scary foes in the last game, and we wonder what role they will play in RE 5

last entry was so critically lauded. The camera still hangs over Chris's shoulder and he can still knock airborne projectiles out of the air with a well-aimed gunshot. But Chris is a little more physical than former hero Leon, and he's got some impressive close combat maneuvers. We saw Chris dodge a flurry of quick axe slashes then kick his attacker in the chest, vault from the top of an overturning bus, and light off a few aggressive chokeholds. Most impressively, Chris shoves a man off him, then winds up with a lunging punch that sends the guy flying backward into an approaching group of villagers. RE 5 looks to fuel that thrill of constantly surviving a string of encounters you are barely prepared to handle.

Unfortunately, RE 5 definitely won't be coming out until next year, so many details are still under wraps, leaving fans with several questions. How will that machete inconspicuously placed on Chris's back be used? Who will Chris be talking to on the other end of that hands-free headset attached to his ear? Who is the mysterious woman who appears at the very end of RE 5's new extended trailer? Check back later for the answers, because we are just as eager as anyone to learn them. ■ ■ ■



■ It's impressive how many people Capcom has been able to get onscreen at once. It's quite terrifying to see them running at you all at once



Everyone loves a pre-rendered cinematic intro



Flavor like marines doing push-ups adds to the atmosphere



XBOX 360

Halo Wars

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) ► **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
► **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS ► **RELEASE** 2008

BACK TO ITS ROOTS



Long ago, before Microsoft purchased Bungie, Halo was conceived as a real-time strategy offering for the Macintosh platform. The rest of the story is history, but that old kernel of an idea is making a return with Halo Wars. This RTS take on the Halo universe is being developed by Age of Empires creators Ensemble Studios, and takes place 20 years prior to the events of the first Halo title.

Halo Wars tells the story of the Spirit of Fire, a UNSC ship that presumably plays a key role in the war between humanity and the Covenant. Marines make up the bulk of Earth's forces, as anyone who pays attention to the fiction knows — Spartans will be in the game, but the super-soldiers' appearance on the battlefield will be an event.

Though the plot follows a starship, there will be no space combat. As Ensemble has pointed out, the Covenant would win any naval engagement hands-down, so there would be little point in putting them in the game.

While what we saw of Halo Wars implied that the gameplay will

closely follow the norms of the RTS genre — resource management, unit creation, and base layout were all very familiar — there are some elements that impressed. The presentation is outstanding, with a score of original musical tracks lending ambience to the fantastic visuals. Vehicle physics are modeled to the point of Warthogs displaying their iconic fishtail maneuvers. Perhaps most importantly,

the battles we saw played out just as you'd expect them to based on the Halo FPSs — the Covenant deployed infantry squads of Grunts led by an Elite, and both sides supported their troops with a variety of vehicles in appropriate roles.

Ensemble purportedly spent six months doing nothing but perfecting the controls (which look very similar to EA's Battle for Middle-earth and Command & Conquer 3 ports on Xbox 360), so Halo Wars should play well. Really, who's going to argue if the gameplay turns out to be solid but unspectacular, as long as we get a visually amazing RTS that tells more of the Halo story? ■■■■

HALO PLOT TIMELINE

2517
John-117 (Master Chief) forcibly conscripted into SPARTAN-II program at age six

2525
SPARTAN-IIs first official mission undertaken

2531
Start of Covenant war

2532
Approximate beginning of Halo Wars

2552
Beginning of Halo: Combat Evolved



Tira's back. Too bad she's, like, the 20th best character in the franchise

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Soulcalibur IV

► **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) ► **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
► **DEVELOPER** PROJECT SOUL ► **RELEASE** 2008

KNIGHTS, SCHOOLGIRLS, AND GIMPS

There isn't much for information yet about Soulcalibur IV, but we're not too worried. The series is coming to next-gen consoles with a furious storm of particle effects and smoothly lit, high-polygon character models — what more do you really need to know? It's still one-on-one fighting, the weapons share the spotlight with the fighters as always, and the cast of characters is beyond diverse. The one thing we truly wanted — outside of the obvious, like new fighters and moves and a few balance tweaks, all of which are present — is online, and Namco Bandai hap-

pily confirmed that feature.

A couple of other minor changes are going into Soulcalibur IV as well. The stages will be more interesting, with moving pieces that players can interact with. To go along with that, the game's design will be less conducive to ringouts, which is undoubtedly great news to Astaroth-haters everywhere. The character generator will be more powerful, and a new single-player mode will replace Chronicles of the Sword from Soul Calibur III. All in all, nothing too unexpected or earth-shattering — yet.

The company has hinted at some bigger changes in store, but since the release date is still a ways off, Namco Bandai has plenty of time to release more specific information. With online definitely in the game, though, we already know everything we need to. The franchise's track record is easily enough to get us on board the Soulcalibur IV train. ■■■■



The ladies are jubblier than ever

Wii

Soulcalibur Legends

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) ► **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
► **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI ► **RELEASE** 2008

BROADENING THE STAGE OF HISTORY



Yaki, as usual, dresses in the traditional purple spandex of her clan

Precedent be damned, Namco Bandai is spinning off this action-oriented adventure from the main franchise. Designed exclusively for Wii, Soulcalibur Legends follows the story of Siegfried's quest between the original Soul Blade and Soul Calibur timelines. The screens show many long-standing series favorites in action, so the German won't be going it alone — though Namco Bandai has dodged any questions regarding multiplayer so far.

Using the Wii remote and its nunchuk attachment to approximate the motions of swinging a weapon, players will grind up legions of foes into mincemeat in

this brawler. Beyond that, we don't know a whole lot yet, other than the fact that Legends will allegedly flesh out the story behind the franchise. How Namco Bandai intends to do that we're not sure; as with most fighting games, the plotline has not historically been much deeper than "Fight!"

Despite the obvious concerns surrounding the game's direction, we're willing to suspend our disbelief and give Soulcalibur Legends a shot at convincing us that it's possible to create a decent fighting game spinoff. We won't know one way or the other until closer to the title's 2008 release date, though. ■■■■

No, those titles are not typos. For some strange reason, Namco changed the series name from Soul Calibur to Soulcalibur





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Army of Two

At E3 we got an update on EA's Army of Two, a title from new studio EA Montreal. The demo showed another extension of the game's co-op focus, whether you're playing with an AI partner or a real-life friend. Similar to the concept of aggro in an online game, where enemies attack the most threatening party member, Army of Two has an aggro meter that is shared between the two characters. When one is more aggro than the other, the non-aggro character effectively becomes invisible to enemies, allowing you to use him stealthily. Back-to-back 360 degree shooting with your partner, near-death minigames, and yes – tampons that soak blood from wounds – are also in the game, and who knows what other surprises will reveal themselves before the title's release before the end of the year.



NINTENDO DS

Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings

Set again in the world of Ivalice – on a floating continent called Lumeres – Revenant Wings tells the continuing adventures of heroes Vaan and Penelo in this pseudo-sequel to last year's huge RPG. Gameplay is a bit closer to the real-time strategy genre, so players will use the touch screen to activate Gambits, move their armies around, and initiate special attacks. Series fans will be happy to note that Motomu Toriyama is directing the game and composer Hitoshi Sakimoto (FF XII, Odin Sphere) is handling the music. Expect to see this launch in the U.S. around November.

102 GAME INFORMER



NINTENDO DS

Contra 4 [working title]

After some hands-on time with this game, we're dubbing it the New Super Mario Bros. of Contra. Developer WayForward is taking everything classic about the franchise and cranking it up a notch. Two players can hook up wirelessly to blast through jungle, waterfall, and alien base stations all to the tune of remixed music and sound effects. Swap between two weapons at any time, and power them up by grabbing two of the same kind. A bionic arm attachment allows players to travel back and forth between the dual screens and even helps you sneak into enemy vehicles. Konami wouldn't say if the Konami code was in the game, only hinting that "this is a Contra game, after all."

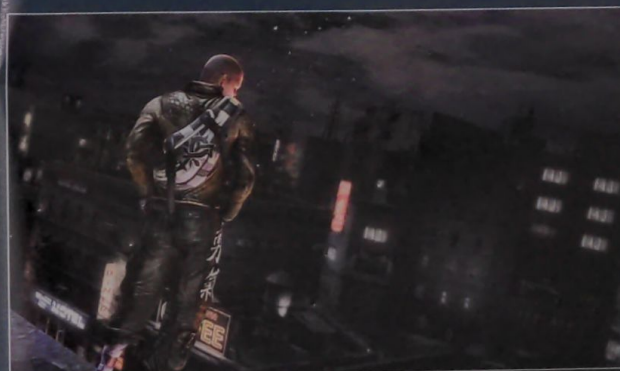
How and what should Harvey examine?



PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law

Just when you think legal wrangling couldn't get much more ridiculous than it is in Phoenix Wright, Capcom ups the ante with a game based on Adult Swim's Harvey Birdman. The show's writers are handling all dialogue and plotting, and many of the show's voice actors have signed on as well. The game will feature five independent cases and looks to emulate the look of the cartoon to a tee. Players will investigate crime scenes, question witnesses, and work the courtroom with a zany cast of characters. Be sure to take the time to catch up on the DVDs before this hits in late '07.



PLAYSTATION 3

Infamous

Sucker Punch earned its chops by creating the excellent Sly Cooper franchise, but now it is leaving their furry friend behind for the excitement of Infamous, a next-gen sandbox title that reminds us a bit of Prototype and Crackdown. Information is scarce on this game, but we do know that you take on the role of a budding superhero. Whether you choose to use your powers for good or evil is entirely up to you. Using your powers to collapse buildings on people who look at you funny is infinitely more entertaining than saving cats from trees, but the choice is yours nonetheless. Wimp.



PLAYSTATION 3

Elefunk

U.K. mobile developer 8bit Games is trying its hand at the PlayStation Network. Players will build various structures like bridges and ramps from a mix of metal, wood, and rope. Once complete, elephants will be sent across to see if your bridge will hold strong or crumble into toothpicks. Elefunk will include puzzle mode, time trial, and a multiplayer deconstruction mode similar to Jenga, where players take turns removing pieces without making the structure collapse. Sony is tentatively planning a fall 2007 release.



Wii

EA Playground

Wouldn't it be fun to play tetherball, dodgeball, or kickball right about now? No, we're not trying to encourage you to go outside. Don't be silly. We're trying to tell you about EA's new minigame collection being developed to recapture all the joys and thrills of a children's playground. Up to four players will be able to compete in everything from skating games to spitballs. If EA really wants to make this the definitive playground simulation then maybe we'll see a digital adaptation of the game we always played after lunch: bloody knuckles.



PLAYSTATION 3

Pain

Sony pitches this game as a concept formulated from a market research report. Sounds sexy, doesn't it? Most of us don't need to pay a marketing firm millions of dollars to find out that flinging helpless people into dangerous situations is hilarious. This downloadable PlayStation Network title allows you to load humans onto a huge slingshot and hurl them toward pending doom, whether that be a skyscraper or a busy intersection. You'll earn points by making your crash test dummy's day as painful as possible. Looks like Steve O finally has some competition.



PLAYSTATION 3

Folklore

The PlayStation 3 has been lacking Sony's typical library of quirky-yet-lovable fantasy RPGs, but Folklore aims to correct this. This action-RPG title stars two young people with very different agendas who meet in a remote village that borders the dream world and reality. The dashing young reporter Keats is working to solve some mysterious murders, while the more subdued dreamer Ellen is hoping to reconnect with her dead mother. In typical Japanese RPG fashion, the two unlikely companions use their magic powers to fend off the monsters they encounter along their journeys.

104 GAME INFORMER



Wii

Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games

It's nice to see Mario, Sonic, Bowser, and Dr. Eggman all lay down their differences to partake in some sportsmanly competition. Based on the actual venues for next year's Olympics in Beijing, this Wii game will cover more than 20 Olympic events and use the Wii controls in a variety of ways. For example, in the triple jump, players will drum the remotes to increase their running speed then flick them up to jump over the hurdles. Mario & Sonic should be ready for competition come this November.



XBOX 360

Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action

Microsoft is getting into the casual family market with a video game version of the popular Scene It DVD board game. Using a new "Big Button Controller" that's suspiciously similar to Sony's Buzz peripheral, up to four players will race to answer over 1,800 questions focused around HD movie clips. Unlike previous forms of Scene It, this version will keep track of questions asked to cut down on repeats. Additionally, bonus question packs are in the works for download over Xbox Live. Look for Screenlife and WXP's game this holiday packed with four controllers for \$59.99.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Silent Hill 5

For a town with as much bad history as Silent Hill, it's amazing that people still step within the city limits. Of course, if they didn't, gamers wouldn't have an excuse to explore the depths of this psychologically disturbing setting. Konami is bringing us the next chapter in the Silent Hill series later next year. This entry follows a veteran soldier searching for his brother, and will be developed by The Collective rather than the usual Team Silent. Details are still slim, but it will be a nice change of pace to control a character with some decent weapons training for once.



XBOX 360

Naruto: Rise of a Ninja

As one of three companies working with the Naruto franchise (along with Namco Bandai and D3), Ubisoft Montreal is hoping to make their title stand out by including plenty of action, platforming, and character development in with the crazy fighting that the anime is known for. Players will embark on quests spanning the entire Naruto television series, gain new powers, and partake in battles that incorporate contextual button pressing for extra damage. Fans will also enjoy some of the best cel-shading out there. Look for Rise of a Ninja this October.



XBOX 360

Viva Piñata: Party Animals

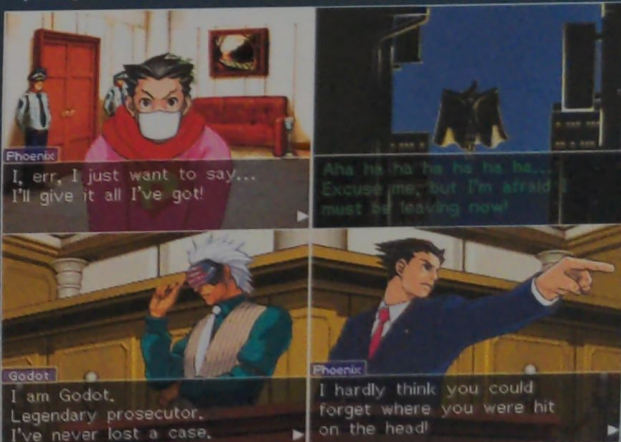
Microsoft is taking Viva Piñata from the animal raising realm to the party game genre in hopes that it might stick this time around. Developer Krome Studios (known for the Tasmanian Tiger and a couple Spyro games) is taking the reins from Rare Ty and incorporating four-player competition, online and off, with over 40 different minigames. You'll have the chance to race in wacky foot races, burp miniature sailboats across a pond, and be the first to eat a bunch of fruit. This button-mashing fest is set to release at the tail end of 2007.



PLAYSTATION 3

PixelJunk Racers

PixelJunk Racers, a high-octane PlayStation Network racer, is being developed by Q-Games, the team that brought us Star Fox Command. The game plays like a high-def version of traditional 2D racing (think Super Sprint) combined with old-school slot car racing (those sparking plastic and metal tracks popular in the '80s). The game looks to be very multiplayer focused and features tracks populated by NPC cars that you must navigate at retina-searing speeds. Players will find a great variety of racing modes to choose from, including one named Escape, which makes you watch your rearview mirror to avoid the NPC cars trying to pass you, each of which will detonate upon impact.



NINTENDO DS

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials and Tribulations

While Japanese fans of the Phoenix Wright series are looking forward to the fifth game, we North Americans are patiently waiting for Capcom to release number three this September. The first case is a flashback to one of Mia Fey's early cases, where she must defend Phoenix in a murder trial. Phoenix will return to the driver's seat for case two, and incorporate all of the same actions from previous games, including the Psyche-Lock. New prosecution rival Godot has an impeccable record and some kind of crazy visor. We're hoping lasers come out of that thing.

GAME INFORMER 105



XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

Spider-Man: Friend or Foe

And you thought the most ridiculous thing you'd ever see Spider-Man do was Jazz dance. Targeted at a younger crowd, Friend or Foe will be structured more like a traditional beat-em-up. Spider-Man will fight alongside heroes and villains like Blade, Iron Fist, Venom, Doc Ock, and the Green Goblin, and multiplayer will support immediate drop-in/drop-out play. This is certainly a bizarre departure for the license, but we think if any superhero can pull it off, it'll be Spider-Man.



PC

Gears of War

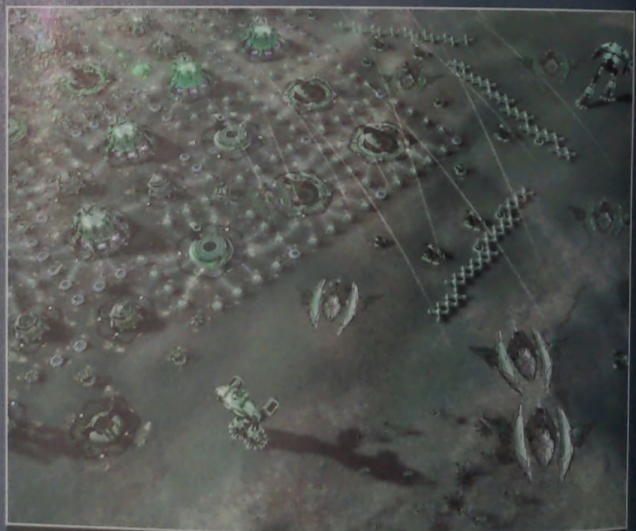
It took a while, but Gears is finally making its way to PC. Luckily for Windows gamers, there's a fair amount of new content. There are five new chapters in the campaign (including an encounter with the colossal Brumak), a map editor, three additional multiplayer maps, and a new online game type. The game will support (but not require) DirectX 10, and seeing it in silky-smooth, super-high resolution motion on a top-end machine is truly amazing. Since Microsoft is publishing it, Gears will use Windows Live for online, so you'll have to pony up that five bucks a month for the full experience. There's no interoperability between the PC and 360 versions, though, so you won't be headshotting scrubs with superior mouselook in this title when it shows up in stores later this year.



XBOX 360 | PC

Battlestar Galactica

As fans of the series, we were hoping that publisher Sierra would release a Battlestar Galactica game that would allow us to jettison Starbuck through an airlock, but being able to hunt her down with a Cylon Raider is more than a fair substitute. In this top-down shooter, fans can relive many of the epic space battles seen in the show (yes, one of them is 33), and can also hop online for 8-player dogfights. The entire game takes place on a single plane, but the action is quite intense, allowing players to launch missiles, fire lasers, activate shields, kick in the thrusters, and spin 180 degrees for a retaliatory strike. An exact release date has yet to be given, but the game is scheduled to hit Xbox Live Arcade and PC this fall.



PC

Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance

The cries of "Fix Supreme Commander's crappy UI!" rang loud from the many corners of the Internet after the game launched to commercial and critical success earlier this year. The developers at Gas Powered Games have taken that demand to heart with this standalone expansion. Forged Alliance features a brand new faction (the Seraphim), 10 new units including a super-powered experimental for each race, and the aforementioned new UI. We can't wait to nuke some more fools when this comes out in November.



PLAYSTATION 3

Wipeout HD

The futuristic racer Wipeout has been a staple of the PlayStation catalog since the beginning, so it comes as no surprise that the series has its first PS3 offering in the works. This time, it sounds like you'll need an Internet connection to get in on the speed, as Wipeout HD will be released only on the PlayStation Network. The racing vehicles and the smooth tracks over which they float look amazing, and the sense of speed in the trailer from E3 was pretty remarkable. It looks as if most of the courses are culled from previous releases, but we'll now be seeing them in high def. No release date yet the U.S., but rumor has it Europe may be wiping out before the end of the year.



Wii

Rayman Raving Rabbids 2

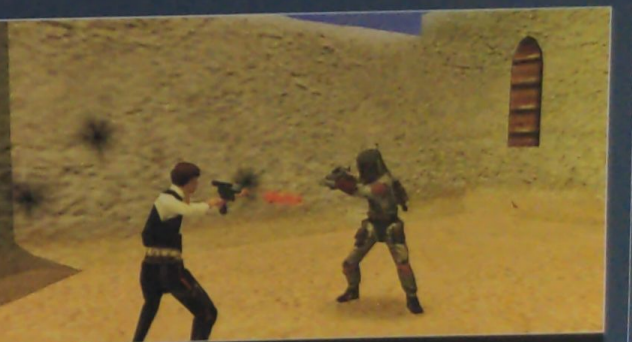
The Rabbids are back with a hare-brained scheme to take over the world. Luckily for us, this devious plot involves 60 new minigames to enjoy. Since our first look a couple issues back, we've had the chance to check out even more of these bite-sized challenges. Our favorites include Nine to Five Rabbid, which tasks you with goofing off in the office as long as you can before the boss pops his head into the room, and Football, which is a cross between the glory days of Tecmo Bowl and the playground game Kill the Carrier. The new four-player party mode will allow you to play these games with your friends simultaneously the Rabbids come back to store shelves on November 15.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2

Cars Mater-National

It would have been easy for the hardcore gaming crowd to dismiss last year's Cars video game as just another piece of kid's licensed junk. That would have been a mistake, as the title turned out to be a lot of fun, and well deserving of the huge sales that came its way. Surprising almost no one, THQ has decided to follow up with a sequel this year. Mater-National will detail the continuing adventures of Lightning and the gang as they host their first big race in Radiator Springs. Rainbow Studios should have kids everywhere racing like crazy before the end of the year, and there's a decent chance more avid gamers may want to check it out for themselves.



PSP

Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron

It may seem odd that LucasArts has chosen to continue the Battlefront series exclusively on PSP at this point, but as long as the company is dedicated to pumping out quality sequels like this one is shaping up to be, we have no complaints. In this iteration, customization is the name of the game. Rather than just picking a troop class, you now have complete control over what weapons your character brings to the battlefield, and also what he or she may look like. As the screenshot above shows, heroes are still a part of the mix. In addition to being able to suit up as IG-88 or Admiral "It's a trap" Ackbar, hero vehicles, such as Vader's TIE Advanced and Boba Fett's Slave I, are available for play. Renegade Squadron will be released on the same day as a new Star Wars-themed PSP this September.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



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BioShock

Rapture was supposed to be a testament to the best humanity has to offer. Instead, the underwater utopia descended into civil war, and now the ocean is slowly reclaiming it. BioShock pits you against the terrifying remnants of this forgotten world, artfully blending atmosphere and intense gameplay to create a twisted paradise that you may never want to escape. 2K Boston (formerly Irrational Games) has crafted a title brimming with endless opportunities and chilling moments that you simply must experience. Turn to page 110 for the review of one of the best games we've ever played.



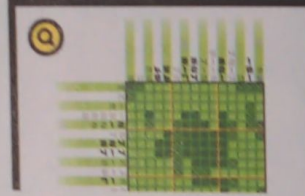
Picross DS LEVEL 2-A

01:33:15



Picross DS LEVEL 1-E

00:23:10



125



Picross DS

Picross DS marks the return of perhaps the ultimate cult classic in Nintendo history. It is a reinvention of Mario's Picross, a beguiling puzzler released for the original Game Boy in 1995. Its simple, logic-based puzzles allow you to create dot-matrix art by filling in an on-screen grid. It's a bit hard to describe, but trust us — as soon as you boot it up, you'll be hooked. Fans of Sudoku and Brain Age, here's your new addition.

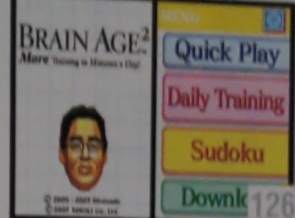
PSP



Dead Head Fred

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NINTENDO DS



Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day

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Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword

Never a developer to disappoint its many fans, Firaxis Games has expanded the already-impressive strategy epic Civilization IV to truly amazing proportions. By adding a massive amount of non-warfare-based ways for players to interact with their rival civilizations, Beyond the Sword opens up gameplay farther than it has ever been before. Whether you choose espionage, corporate imperialism, or the revamped space race, there are more paths to dominance than the most tyrannical despot could ask for.

reviews

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pg. 114

Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
5	Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
4	Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in externally small quantities, if at all.
1	Harry Loves Hermione. Fan Fiction. Pathetic and hopeless, with no place in any universe, real or imagined.

> **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

> **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

> **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

> **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> **Replay Value**

High	You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
Moderately High	Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
Moderate	Good for a few months or a few times through.
Moderately Low	After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
Low	You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

ESRB E	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	M	Content suitable for persons 17 and older.
ESRB E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	M	Content suitable only for adults.
ESRB E	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.	RP	Product is awaiting final rating.
ESRB T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

For our newer readers, here is a glossary of terms and acronyms that commonly appear in the magazine. Video game veterans should move along (these aren't the droids you are looking for).

1080i	A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced.	board	A term we use for games like Jeopardy! and Mario Party.
480p	Progressive scanning, this option ("p" = progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture. 480p (= enclosed), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.	cel shading	A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cells.
720p	A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format.	ES	Electronic Entertainment Expo. The world's largest convention for video games.
action	A term we use for games like Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe.	fighting	A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive.
ad hoc	A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity.	first-party	A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system.
adventure	A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island.	FPS	Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First Person Shooters like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty.
AI	Artificial Intelligence. Usually used to refer to how well the computer reacts to a human opponent.	frame rate	The frames of animation used to create the illusion of movement.
bloom	An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces.	front-end	A game's menus and options.
		GBA	Game Boy Advance.
		GC	GameCube.
		HDTV	High Definition Television.
		infrastructure	A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances.

isometric	Three-quarters top-down view, like Starcraft or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance.	platform	A term we use for games like Super Mario and Crash Bandicoot.
ISP	Internet Service Provider. The company that provides you with access to the Internet.	pop-up	When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance.
jaggies	Graphical lines that are jagged when they should be straight.	PS2	Sony PlayStation 2.
LAN	Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay.	puzzle	A term we use for games like Tetris and Puyo Puyo.
MMO	Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft.	racism	A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart.
motion blur	Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed.	RPG	Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Xenoblade.
normal mapping	A graphical technique in which a texture is containing 3D information, revealed by light reflecting off the surface, is wrapped around a box's model.	shooter	A term we use for games like Run or Gears of War.
NPC	Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans.	sports	A term we use for games like Madden NFL.
particle effects	Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time.	strategy	A term we use for games like Warcraft and Front Mission.
		third-party	Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer.
		"You Peter Moore'd it up!"	What you say to a friend who keeps pausing Rock Band mid-song. Also works if said friend quits a job to head up EA Sports.



GAME INFORMER
★
GAME OF THE MONTH

XBOX 360

BioShock

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
> DEVELOPER 2K BOSTON > RELEASE AUGUST 21 > ESRB M

MADNESS FROM BELOW

■ You haven't felt like you've been punched in a game until you get a fist full of death from a Big Daddy

Deep beneath the surface of the ocean, at a depth where not even the faintest trace of the sun's mighty light can be seen, the cold, obdurate blackness holds the future of mankind. It's here that the underwater metropolis known as Rapture was built with the dream of the top brass of science congregating to build a better tomorrow. As the experiments and theories began to take shape, science defeated common sense, and something went wrong. Something went terribly wrong. As your bathysphere descends toward this revered paradise, you are hit with the sinking fear that mankind may have gone too far. It's not until you step foot in the ruins of this city that you realize just how real this fear is.

It's this expedition of discovery, laced heavily with the philosophical undertones of Ayn Rand, that makes BioShock such a uniquely compelling game. It makes you feel like a fish out of water, gasping for air as the world around you takes shape in twisted and horrifying ways. Young girls, who could be no older than 12, scour the city's dimly lit hallways for corpses to harvest. Lumbering giants, outfitted in scuba suits, emit moans like blue whales and wield a small army's worth of weaponry. This world is as dangerous as it is wondrous. You want to flee, yet you can't help but be hopelessly entranced by its strange beauty.

As much as you want to stare at its odd machinations and soaring architecture, the biggest draw in this underwater society is the power you have over it. With the flick of your fingers, you can send an agitated swarm of bees whizzing toward an ill-tempered denizen. Or, with the same motion, lightning could jump off of your fingertips into a pool of water to electrify a small gathering of mutants. If magical abilities fail, you can always turn to a pistol outfitted with armor-piercing bullets to take out an airborne robotic sentry, or something more unforeseen, like a chemical thrower with your choice of napalm, electrical gel, or liquid nitrogen. And if you just want to

mess with the freaks of Rapture, you could always hack into their security systems so that a health station delivers poison, or that a turret targets the people that originally programmed it. This high concept gameplay has variety in spades, and is polished to the point that every battle feels like a small war — you won't believe how much stress and chaos one ordinary thug can create. The game may sound incredibly complicated, but it couldn't be easier to control. Your character's movements are remarkably smooth, the targeting system functions perfectly, and weapon/power switching is effortless.

BioShock also may seem like a game driven by its setting and the atmosphere it creates. While delivering a level of intrigue you rarely see in games, its most captivating element is its gameplay — which I can easily say delivers the most rewarding and adrenaline-filled experience I have ever had with an FPS.

Everything about this game screams perfection, but there's one element that might not sit well with you. Rather than dying in battle, players

simply respawn at a vita-chamber. The damage dealt to an adversary remains even though the player didn't succeed. You simply have to go back and clean up your mess to continue on. As intense as the gameplay is, knowing you really can't fail takes some of the bite out of it. Yes, this system will allow gamers of all skill levels to complete the game — which is a developer's dream — but it may alienate gamers who only turn to games for a challenge.

Of course, even if you play games strictly for the difficulty that they bring, BioShock is a title that needs to be played, simply because you will never look at an FPS the same way again. Of the 15 to 20 hours of gameplay that it delivers, there isn't a second wasted. Once you finish the game, there's little chance that you'll take it out before playing it again to see the second ending.

It's ingenious, enthralling, and a masterpiece of the most epic proportions. So without further delay, would you kindly enter Rapture so that you too can experience the best that video games have to offer? —REINER



■ In this situation, you could easily kill both of these bums by force propelling the dynamite that is about to be thrown right back at them

BOTTOM LINE 10

> **Concept:** The creators of System Shock 2 have honed their craft to create an FPS that is as adventurous as it is powerful

> **Graphics:** In almost every room, you'll stop to carefully analyze the amazing detail applied to every surface and object. It's one of the most beautiful games out there

> **Sound:** The classic music, haunting voice recordings, and sound of insanity blend to create an eerie and intimidating array of sound. The surround sound support is also of a higher level than you usually hear

> **Playability:** No matter what weapon or power you have equipped, you always feel like a god

> **Entertainment:** The power to destroy has never been so varied and satisfying

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

WHAT ABOUT PC?

Due to circumstances beyond our control, we were unable to review the PC version of BioShock this month. If there are substantive differences, we will publish a separate review at a later date.

Second Opinion 10

You stand over a genetically mutated corpse with a camera in hand, taking a picture of its final, twisted expression to appease a cruel puppet master. A haunting rendition of "Bei mir bist du schön" plays from a radio, over which you hear the low, whale-like cry of a Big Daddy as it ambles into sight. You freeze, but the hulking creature trips one of your proximity mines and fixes a glowing red eye on you in fury. Heart-stopping moments like these are what set BioShock apart as one of the most intelligent and daring masterpieces in gaming. The ruined utopia of Rapture is portrayed in vivid detail, and it's impossible not to get immersed in the story of its collapse as you fight to escape with an ingenious mixture of weapons and powers. A focus on survival takes center stage, as the game gives you just enough resources to improvise, but never enough to feel totally secure. Even so, every battle is a new opportunity to experiment with your abilities and unlock your potential. The respawn system slightly diminishes the stakes, but the intensity never wanes; you've still got to make every bullet count. In terms of delivering chilling atmosphere, dynamic combat, and startling revelations, games just don't come any better than BioShock. —JOE

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Madden NFL 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 14 > **ESRB** E

MOVING THE CHAINS

No NFL team appears overnight with a playoff-caliber team. It takes good drafting, coaching, and wise free agency acquisitions. It takes time. Madden fans can be assured that the last two years of the franchise weren't all for naught. This year's game sees the franchise finally reaching an acceptable level on and off the field. There is undoubtedly work still left to be done before the series can match the glories of the past, but this is a noticeably better game the moment you pick up the controller.

A small benchmark I have for a football game is what happens when I play defense—specifically comeback. Being out on that island where reaction times and smooth transitions between movement animations make all the difference gives me a good feel for player movement. I can thankfully say that this game is quick and precise enough that I'll no longer just be playing the defensive line. The game feels faster than last year, and the action has no problem leaping off the screen at you. Receivers

make spectacular grabs, defenders are feared for the ferocious hits they lay out, and offensive tackles desperately shove defensive ends as they get beat around the corner. But for every play that feels like the Madden we remember and love, there are times when the animations take precedence over user control, players morph through each other, and the AI exposes itself. Defensive backs are aggressive, but can rely on ESP, and conversely there are times receivers are unaware of the ball. The QB directional passing is also inconsistent.

Fans have lamented the drop in features in past Maddens, but 08 pulls things back up to speed with extensive scouting/draft options and pre-game training for improving players. Overall, there are more draft tools at your disposal—including being able to manually rearrange your entire draft board, although the process itself of scouting and drafting is a little cumbersome. There are also financial info and stadium options, but finances aren't a major part in your franchise,



theedge

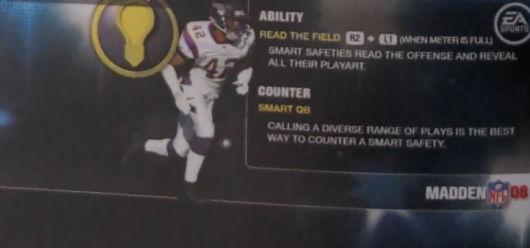
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Like EA Sports' NCAA football title, The Edge goes to the Xbox 360 edition. It seems developer Tiburon has been having a little trouble recently with the PlayStation 3, particularly with the frame rate.

and you can only build a new stadium if you relocate to another city. In general, some of the new features are a mixed bag. The designation of star players as weapons is a useful concept, as it helps you engineer weaknesses—my favorite weapon skill was the one that allowed me to see an opponent's play if they called it too many times in one game. On the other hand, the effect of the receiver catching controls and defensive spotlighting of star receivers was so slight as to be non-existent.

If all this year's Madden did was restore its feature set, then that alone would hardly be cause for hope. However, by improving the gameplay, it makes it so I'm much more apt to actually play more than one season before putting my controller down. This series isn't out of the woods just yet, but this year lets it be known that Madden's best days aren't behind it. —KATO

Each weapon designation has another weapon on the other side of the ball or a strategy that cancels it out. Mixing and matching these is your job each and every down



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** EA presents the most full-featured next-gen Madden yet, and the gameplay is improving

> **Graphics:** As always, Madden looks really sharp and the animations can be breathtaking

> **Sound:** This game really needs to bring back booth announcers. I'd even consider Bill Mays—that's how dire the situation is

> **Playability:** The pre-snap options are plentiful and easier to execute than in the past

> **Entertainment:** This is the most playable next-gen Madden yet

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Madden has been phoning it in the past few seasons, but this year it finally shows up to training camp on time and in shape. The team at Tiburon has refined the on-the-field action, and the results are noticeable as soon as you line up under center. Gone are steroid freak player models and the rigid animation that essentially broke the gameplay. In their place is a wealth of great-looking and dynamic animations and a gameplay system that finally has more pros than cons. Madden still suffers from noticeable flaws that shouldn't plague a franchise this stoned and refined—like tractor beam passes that deviate in mid air from receivers to defensive backs, poor pass coverage AI, the sorry lack of online leagues, and the bare bones presentation (bring back TV-style commentating please!). But in the war of attrition that has been the next-gen NFL experience, at least Madden 08 finally offers decent gameplay to go along with its deep franchise mode. —BERTZ

Please note: The Wii version of Madden was not available for review by the time we went to print. Rest assured, however, that we will look at it next issue.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NASCAR 08

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 15-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** JULY 23 > **ESRB** E

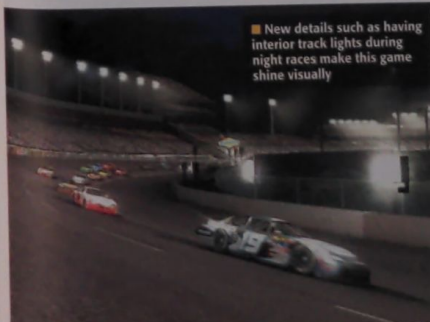
IN RACING TRIM

Last year's game was not unlike Junior's limbo status between DEI and Hendrick this season. The title was just biding its time until its sweet new ride could be lined up. Now that the series is on next-gen systems, it can just mash the gas. How is this game on the restart? It's a mix of first-year basics and interesting new ideas.

NASCAR 08's Chase mode isn't just the Chase for the Cup. Instead, it has you earn licenses (covering things like drafting, etc.) at different track types in order to earn contracts. These let you race real drivers' cars, asking that you finish in the top 10, for instance. Complete a contract and that driver's race setup will be available for you to take to races on the official season schedule. This slightly different take is a little odd since it lacks a connection to a single theme. You're not really your own team since

you're racing other drivers' cars (although you can rebrand them with your team colors) and yet you can't drive for or take over an existing team. Then again, I applaud the team for taking a different approach to a racing game—something I've been dying for—and giving us more than just another sports title that is a slave to the real life schedule. You will be disappointed, however, if you'd rather play a career mode that lets you join Roush Racing, for example.

Tweaks are needed in the AI to better replicate competitors' actions and racing lines, and I'd like to see some long-overdue additions (like user-controlled pit stops), but this game has got the feel of a stock car down pretty good—especially with about a billion ways to setup your car. It's a mix of the new and familiar that shakes out to be a pretty fast restart. —KATO



New details such as having interior track lights during night races make this game shine visually

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** The game's career mode throws a curveball, but the title's basics are the same

> **Graphics:** Pretty solid, although I wish it had the speed blur from last year

> **Sound:** The sounds of the track have been changed yet again for more realism

> **Playability:** Not challenging until you move off of the default difficulty setting and driving assists

> **Entertainment:** Gearheads will like tweaking their cars, while the career structure presents a more accessible pace

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

I don't think anyone can deny that EA Sports always does a decent job with each year's edition, but the predictability of its execution also means that I never really feel blown away from year to year. So as you might have guessed, NASCAR 08 is no exception. The driving mechanic has once again been fine-tuned this year, and I must say that I like it quite a bit. It's a little unpredictable at times, but the feeling of riding on the edge is well conveyed. The Chase challenges are interesting, but nothing to write home about. I'd like to see the crashes be a bit more spectacular, and the fact that this game still lacks some kind of interactive pit stop still bewilders me. Pit stops are a huge part of the sport and being unable to affect their success or failure is just plain stupid. —ANDY

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 28 > **ESRB** E



AN ABSOLUTE TRIUMPH

Like Tiger Woods making a late surge in the final round, this franchise has found its fighting spirit and came out with a stellar performance. Using the ground laid by last year's game, this Tiger adds a few simple pieces to reinvigorate itself and make the series more fun than it's been in a while.

It's hard to say where this game goes so right. Yeah, it's a brilliant idea to let people record their best shots and put them online via Gamernet for others to play and vice versa—a feature that'll explode once players get a hold of it and really show their stuff. But I think it's because of the whole package more than any one feature. You've got the addition of a three-click swing, the inclusion of a shot confidence element that records stats on your strokes, and onscreen shot info that gives you immediate feedback on your hook/slice and power. The only thing I'd change about the gameplay is that I wish there was a way to remap the

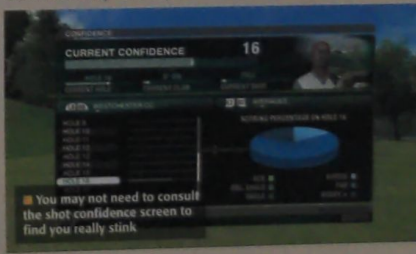
analog club swing and/or the power button so they don't interfere with each other so much during your swing. Maybe there needs to be an updated way to generate spin and power on your shots.

Thankfully Tiger 08's Tiger Challenge mode hasn't been overhauled—only augmented. The skill rating system with its potential tiers integrates the PGA tour, skill Challenges, and Tiger Challenge, and now the latter offers more variety in its tasks. The honeycomb grid layout of the Tiger Challenge gives you the freedom to tryout some events before taking on the pros.

Sometimes when you're golfing you nail a hole because you bail yourself out with a superb putt, chip, or tee shot. But this game is instead like masterfully shot hole, where each stroke feels just right. —KATO

PUTTING WITH THE WII

Unfortunately, the Wii version of Tiger Woods was not available for review at the time of print. Look for it next month.



You may not need to consult the shot confidence screen to find you really stink

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Tiger takes its biggest leap forward since it came into the modern era with Tiger 2004

> **Graphics:** The Photo Game Face works pretty good. Best if you have an Xbox 360 camera

> **Sound:** It's hard not to like the warm, dulcet burr of the sometimes odd announcers

> **Playability:** The new three-click swing, draw/fade options, and shot info are simple but brilliant additions

> **Entertainment:** Prolong that you can create an awesome yearly sports franchise without having to reinvent your wheel

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9

Tiger's back with some new tricks. As always, there are myriad Skills Challenges and Tiger Challenges to help you build your character (which can now be made to look frighteningly like you with the help of the Xbox camera). Also, the ability to post online challenges and highlights could become a real phenomenon if embraced by the community—here's to hoping. On the nuts and bolts side, the three-click swing is back, along with new fade and draw mechanics. I really enjoyed the ability to toggle the three-click on and off, which lent itself to some interesting tactical decisions as you weigh the benefits of trying analog vs. three-click in certain situations. Overall, it's a very nice outing for Tiger this year, and I'm pleased to see that EA put some real effort into implementing some innovative changes. —MATT



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII

Transformers

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES > **RELEASE** JUNE 27 > **ESRB** T

ONE SHALL STAND, ONE SHALL FALL

If you're a child of the '80s, those words should mean something to you. Despite drastic character redesigns, altered story elements, and the absence of a certain VW bug, the Transformers game is stuffed full of fan service to long-time enthusiasts. It's also an exciting, wild ride of explosions, falling buildings, and cars tumbling end-over-end through the air. But, behind all the noise and confusion, it's a shallow, short, and simplistic game.

One of the coolest aspects of this video game treatment of the beloved toy line is the ability to choose a side and carry it to victory. Like those massive toy wars you used to fight in your basement, you'll have access to several characters from both sides of the conflict, from a roaring jet like Starscream to a modernized Bumblebee in the form of a speeding Camaro. Every one of the characters you play can transform at will (for some reason, labeled "convert" in the onscreen instructions), and this functionality is well utilized as missions move between speed-oriented vehicle sections to battles more suited to the robot forms.

The character designs, their transformations, and the way they look while attacking are all sights to behold. The remarkable amount of detail will sometimes have you rotating the camera around just to get a better look. Even the drones that serve as cannon fodder look great; the game designers deserve a special nod for including a certain beloved

Generation 1 character not seen in the movie.

The degree of destruction is positively out of control throughout the game. Few and far between are the moments that don't have a burning building, a bus flying through the air, or a power station exploding with a titanic crash. Tiny, antlike humans flee wildly underneath these giant metal warriors, and foolish motorists just don't seem to get the message that the intersections in which you're fighting should really be detoured around. Instead, dozens of vehicles, trees, lampposts, and rubble all act as interactive weapons to fling at your foes. It's a profound level of chaos.

The extent of the carnage is hiding something—shoddy combat. The amazing ranged weaponry these alien robots wield is effectively neutered in every situation that matters, thanks to instantaneous energy shields that pop up on most enemies. The melee attacks certainly look cool, but it's basically a single button getting mashed with little variety built in. A horrible camera shake has been added as you lumber around, apparently to accentuate how big and powerful these guys are. Instead, the effect is mostly headache inducing, and makes it hard to see what's going on in the more heated battles. Driving

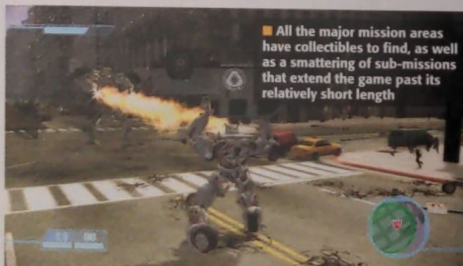
theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Both the PS3 and 360 versions look surprisingly sharp and detailed. The Wii version is an almost identical game, but with horribly down-rezzed visuals that create a smeared blurry quality, particularly on high-end TVs. The remote swinging combat works okay for pounding out melee attacks, but the motion-controlled camera is a pain.

missions are loose and unwieldy, flight missions are constrained by a fixed altitude, and everything screams out a moronic level of simplicity.

In the end, Transformers delivers over-the-top action with wild abandon, and leaves most of the more complex elements of good gameplay behind coughing from the dust kicked up by a giant transforming war machine. While each campaign will only last a few hours, it's fun if you can overlook how mindlessly you're slamming those buttons. But, if you're one of those strange unfortunates who have never understood the appeal of gargantuan robots that turn into tanks and tractor trailers, this game certainly isn't going to transform you into a believer.—**MILLER**



■ All the major mission areas have collectibles to find, as well as a smattering of sub-missions that extend the game past its relatively short length



■ Several levels have you bashing down armies of repetitive drones



■ A few cool extras like movie trailers, pictures of the toys, and Generation 1 models of the main characters are welcome additions

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Choose a side in the never-ending war of two robot groups that beat each other senseless whenever possible

> **Graphics:** A surprising level of detail on characters and some great combat animations make the game look better than most licensed products

> **Sound:** The original cartoon voices of both Optimus Prime and Megatron steal the show

> **Playability:** Well mapped controls, but an overly simplistic combat mechanic is disappointing

> **Entertainment:** As a fulfillment of childhood robot-smashing fantasies—quite satisfying. As a full featured next-gen game—lacking

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

In most games, you really have to go out of your way to achieve a high level of destruction. In Transformers, even when you try to avoid destruction, you usually end up leveling a city block.

With impressive graphics showering debris everywhere, each battle ends up being just as awe-inspiring as a Fourth of July fireworks show. As much as I enjoyed punching the life out of Bumblebee, the gameplay can basically be summarized as a glorified version of Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots. The transformations are certainly cool, and the brawling mechanic is nicely designed. Unfortunately, most of the missions are incredibly short, and the vehicle segments are either backed by poor controls or push players to complete frustrating time goals. With that said, I can't emphasize enough how much fun it is to throw a haymaker with a mechanical monster. This thrill, which covers the majority of the game, turns Transformers into an enjoyable, albeit shallow, weekend of gaming.—**REINER**



WII | PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Ratatouille

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** HEAVY IRON STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 26 > **ESRB** E

STINKY CHEESE

The artists at Pixar have done more than anyone in the movie business to make CG animated films a genuine art form. Sadly, as original and inventive as their films are, the games made based on them more resemble cookie-cutter Pixar rip-off flicks like *Surf's Up* and *Ice Age*.

Mario and Ratchet & Clank aside, the once-proud platformer is in dismal shape these days, and Ratatouille will do little to lift its sagging fortunes. It's largely a rote recycling of the film, and, although it does feature real voiceovers from the cast, it does little to expand the experience. You may not own Ratatouille, but trust me—in a way, you've already played it. Almost nothing here is new or unique—it's the same old jumping, climbing, and collecting various wid-

gets that we've all been doing over and over for what seems like forever.

There's a few slightly more novel gameplay sequences, like some rafting, sliding, and cooking segments that—while no great shakes—at least succeed in not being as bad as the core gameplay. Ditto for the minigames, even if some of them are essentially repeats of stuff you've already seen in the main character mode. Pretty uninspiring stuff, but I guess if you're a parent looking for a (relatively) harmless game to pick up for a small child it might do the trick. I'd like to think your kids deserve better. Either way, no one who measures his or her age in more than one digit is likely to find this entertaining. Note: The Wii version has different (and worse) control.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **Concept:** A staid platformer based on the hit animated film

> **Graphics:** Remember the movie? It looks like that, except way uglier

> **Sound:** Real voiceovers are a plus, and the score is nice

> **Playability:** You automatically stick to wires and platforms, giving the already stale gameplay a mechanical feel

> **Entertainment:** I love the film, but this is not worth your time

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.5

Wait a minute—is seeing the movie a prerequisite for playing the game? I don't understand most of what's going on. Not that this kind of game needs a strong plot, but when your game is based on a Pixar movie, it shouldn't be that hard to give it an entertaining story. Anyway, this game's platforming is pretty banal, but on top of that it's way too easy. You hold a button and it shows you where to go. You die and you start right where you left off. I don't even know why they bothered with health. And what's most frustrating is that some of the game's context-sensitive actions don't always seem to work. I don't think I can recommend this to anyone—especially fans of the movie. It will probably tarnish your good memories.—**BEN**



XBOX 360

Ratatouille

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** HEAVY IRON STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 26 > **ESRB** E



■ Many minigames are included, but few are good

NOT A FEAST, BUT A NICE SNACK

As a gamer, I can't say that I'm entirely comfortable with a rat securing the lead role in a game. As any pixel-loving game junkie will tell you, the rat is the sacrificial rodent of gaming. Most journeys begin with the player slicing a rat, or hundreds of rats, thousands if you are truly lucky, to bits. But, since everything that Pixar touches these days turns to gold, I figured I would give this little vermin a chance.

Like the film, this game follows the exploits of Remy, a rat who aspires to become one of France's most famous chefs. With a taste for only the finest of foods, Remy's dinners, which must be properly seasoned, often require a hair-raising chase before they are fully cooked.

Most of Ratatouille's gameplay is comprised of fast-moving platform-based challenges. For a property that is so kid-centric, it's surprising how difficult some of this game's feats are. Leaping from a ledge to a wire requires the highest level of precision,

and all of the timed missions push for a blend of speed and perfection in your movement. Since your character is so small, the daunting size of the environment adds an extra layer of difficulty to most of the challenges. To Remy, an average-sized human looks like a lumbering giant, and a two-story climb up a building is similar to scaling Everest. Whether you are balancing on a wire or are rolling around on a ball, most of the gameplay works well—except for the jump button being a bit sticky, which can lead to some frustrating moments. Many of the minigames also feel unpolished and are more trouble than they need to be.

Ratatouille won't do much to change my mind about the role rats should have in video games, but it did provide two afternoon's worth of satisfying platforming. If you go into it knowing that stretches of it can be aggravating, either because they push your skills to the test or make you question the gameplay, it should do the same for you.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** A moderately enjoyable platformer based on the feature film

> **Graphics:** Remy's hair is impressive, but for as big as the environments are, the detail isn't there to back them up

> **Sound:** Nice voiceover from the cast, but there's little in terms of environmental sound

> **Playability:** The larger-than-life challenges are marred by sticky controls, but still deliver some thrills

> **Entertainment:** Roughly 8 to 10 hours of platforming challenges that should appeal to fans of the Disney games of old and Jak and Daxter

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

The Xbox 360 version of Ratatouille is markedly better than the PS2/Wii/Xbox version, by which I mean it achieves pleasant mediocrity instead of utter boredom. While it's by no means unique, it does offer a more well-rounded, open-world style experience that better helps translate the world of the film into game form. The gameplay is solid, despite nagging camera and control issues, and a host of unique missions and minigames gives it a sense of variety that at least kept me interested in continuing Remy's quest to become a rodent gourmet. It's not amazing, but it's solid fun for younger Pixar fans.—**MATT**



■ A sense of scale is factored into each of the goals



BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: Assemble a dream team of creative minds to fashion an RPG that incorporates some of the best the genre has to offer.

> Graphics: Akira Toriyama's art transitions perfectly into 3D; the characters look like sculpted figures wandering around a world built to scale.

> Sound: The boss theme (performed by Deep Purple's Ian Gillan) sounds out of place, but the music is otherwise appropriate and beautiful. The voice acting is also exceptionally good.

> Playability: Unless you're playing in HD, some of the text may be difficult to read. It never hampers the action, though.

> Entertainment: It's full of classic appeal and fun mechanics for the RPG faithful, but even casual fans should find it accessible.

> Replay Value: Moderately High.



WHAT'S YOUR POSITION?

You may have thought that the days of drawing your own maps were done, but it wouldn't hurt to keep a pencil and paper nearby for Blue Dragon. A small on-screen minimap will show your immediate surroundings in dungeons, but there isn't way to see an entire area. This isn't a problem for most zones, but there are some with similar corridors that branch off and fold in on themselves. Since the camera is left to the player's control, this can make it easy to get turned around. The do-it-yourself cartography isn't a necessity by any means, but it can help you make sure you've explored every corner and gotten all the treasures.

and humor. The tone will even shift unexpectedly from lighthearted to macabre, but there just isn't much in terms of surprises.

It is difficult to place too much fault on a game for not shattering storytelling conventions, especially since Blue Dragon feels like a well-oiled RPG machine in the way it integrates combat, character growth, and exploration. From its astounding visuals to the constantly compelling gameplay, this experience will make role-playing veterans recall the good old days, and give newcomers the opportunity to start creating some memories. —JOE

XBOX 360

Blue Dragon

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER: MISTWALKER/ARTOON **> RELEASE:** AUGUST 28 **> ESRB:** T

GET A JOB!

As Blue Dragon begins and I leave Talta Village with Shu, Jiro, and Kluge, it's hard to deny that there is a kind of familiarity underlying the adventure. It isn't a "been there, done that" sensation though — it is more like the game is reminding me of all the good times I've had with role-playing titles over the years. Blue Dragon is far more than a mere exercise in nostalgia, however; it may utilize traditional concepts, but it also expands them, creating an experience that feels like the culmination of classic RPG evolution.

Through the course of the tale, each of the five main characters gains a beastly shadow that is capable of learning a variety of skills, which makes up the central gameplay element: the job system. While not drastically different than the one found in titles like Final Fantasy V, the level of customization this mechanic affords players is incredibly engaging. I never felt like the game was shoe-horning my characters into a class, and it is an addictive balancing act to switch among jobs to ensure you have an optimal selection of abilities. Be sure to check the manual to see what skills you're working toward, since the game never clearly lays out

your advancement. Even so, this system always seems to put you a step ahead of regular enemies while still presenting you with challenging boss encounters.

Some of the skills you learn have non-combat applications that meld seamlessly with the game's overworld segments. Instead of just wandering around waiting to fight, these abilities put you right in the driver's seat. Some make you invisible so you can avoid encounters altogether, while others make it possible to gain experience and skill points without even entering combat (make sure at least one of your party members gets Field Barrier II as soon as possible).

The core mechanics are presented with a high level of polish, but Blue Dragon lacks the jaw-dropping moments to make it legendary. It is immensely fun to play, but there is a hard-to-define spark missing from the story and events. The plot is by no means a flop; the trials of Shu and company and their conflict against the evil Nene (who simply enjoys witnessing the suffering of others) are relayed with a great deal of intrigue



XBOX 360

Project Sylpheed

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT/SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER:** GAME ARTS/SETA
> RELEASE: JULY 10 **> ESRB:** T



HITTING A SMALL TARGET

As I recall another console game with so many of those three, your long dormant piloting skills are about to come in handy in one of the most difficult and eye-catching space combat games in years. That's why it's all the more sad that this development team made the game so unfriendly and inaccessible to the rest of the gaming populace.

I don't recall another console game with so many of those three, your long dormant piloting skills are about to come in handy in one of the most difficult and eye-catching space combat games in years. That's why it's all the more sad that this development team made the game so unfriendly and inaccessible to the rest of the gaming populace.

Of course, for a few players (myself included), the conquering of that chaos is the real joy. It takes several hours, numerous mission restarts, and a willingness to accept that in some cases, they're not even going to tell you your time limits or secondary objectives until after the mission is done. It's poor game design to my eye, but among all those complexities and confusions is a great flight game. Once you understand the controls, you're a positive force for destruction, taking out dozens of fighters in a single pass, and strafing giant battleships with impossibly powerful rail guns as you twist and turn past their AA guns. It's thrilling, and it's unfortunate that the game has been put together in such a way that so few will be able to enjoy the excitement.

The beautiful CG outscenes and their well-voiced characters are predictable, but they come as a welcome reward at the end of a big fight. The cool ship you fly is also customizable with a number of weapons, but I'm not sure that's enough of a draw to keep me coming back again and again. Few remember the old Sylpheed games, and few will remember their slightly respelled 360 sequel — but those who do will do so with fondness. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: Fly through space while unleashing dozens of missiles and laser blasts at your foes.

> Graphics: Impressive onscreen chaos, and the CG outscenes look pretty darn nice.

> Sound: Excellent anime-styled voiceover work is plentiful.

> Playability: One of the most complicated and convoluted control schemes imaginable is made worse by a cluttered HUD.

> Entertainment: Fans of 3D aerial shooters are in for a challenging and fun adventure — others will shake their head and start digging through the bag for the exchange receipt.

> Replay Value: Moderately Low.

Second Opinion 7.5

If NASA implemented a space combat training program, there's a good chance that it would be easier to complete than Project Sylpheed. This game holds nothing back, and would love nothing more than to hear that it forever imprinted a Game Over screen into the minds of its players. Just figuring out the complicated control scheme takes hours of training, but ends up being well worth the effort. The battles that unfold are the very definition of harrowing, and are so beautiful that you have to force yourself to block out the explosive visuals to focus on the war at hand. The missions are fairly repetitive, but the rewarding quick-trigger combat and thrill of overcoming the worst of odds makes Project Sylpheed a memorable play for gamers who daydream of galaxies far, far away. —REINER

XBOX 360 QUICKIES

XBOX 360

Wartech: Senko No Ronde

> STYLE: 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER: UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER:** GRIFFIN
> RELEASE: MAY 22 **> ESRB:** T



BOTTOM LINE 3.75

It saddens me that someone might not read this review, and thus might never know what a horrible mistake it would be to spend money on this travesty. In mech-like "rounders," you'll float around a small game board banging on buttons to fire out attacks at your similarly armed opponent, until one or the other of you triggers "BOSS" mode and transforms into a giant screen-filling machine of destruction. Sounds fun, right? There is little in the way of discernable strategy or skill, the controls are never explained, and they're unresponsive once you do figure them out. If this game had a head, it should hang it in shame for daring to be part of the 360 library. —MILLER

XBOX 360

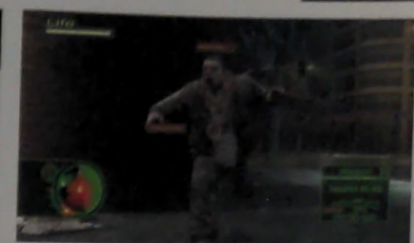
Hour of Victory

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> PUBLISHER: MIDWAY **> DEVELOPER:** INFUSION
> RELEASE: JUNE 25 **> ESRB:** M



BOTTOM LINE 2.5

I haven't seen a game that is this close to being totally broken since the console manufacturers created an approval process. When you see things like enemies standing idle with their faces against a wall, you have to wonder how Hour of Victory got a stamp of approval from Microsoft. The AI of your adversaries is so spotty that you'll see them firing point blank at a wall, and they rarely are capable of ducking low enough behind a structure for cover. As I found, most enemies cannot react quickly at all, which leaves them open for a knife to the throat almost every time. If the single-player campaign isn't painful enough, Hour of Victory offers a multiplayer component so poorly constructed that just trying to shoot another person makes you feel as stupid and incompetent as the game's AI. At the very most, Hour of Victory is deserving of Worst Game of the Year honors. —REINER



XBOX 360

Vampire Rain

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT/AQ INTERACTIVE **> DEVELOPER:** ARTOON
> RELEASE: JULY 3 **> ESRB:** M

TRIAL AND TERROR

You are Fam Sisher — I mean, John Lloyd — a member of a special ops team sent in to take out an army of Nightwalkers. Instead of fighting these vampires, however, players will mostly have to avoid them in search of the one correct path through a level. You know how in most stealth games you can usually escape after you get spotted? These speedy jerks will kill you almost instantly no matter where you run or hide. Due to the liberal use of invisible walls and impassable vampires, Artoon has ensured that you can only survive by climbing that one fire escape, shimmying along the ledge, and sliding down the right drain pipe. It costs many deaths in the name of trial-and-error to progress at all.

Your pistols and machine guns are completely useless, and only really exist to shoot off the occasional padlock or scare up some crows as a distraction. It's not until later in the game that you'll get a sniper rifle, shotgun, or UV knife (which evaporates after each use). Even then, you can use them only for brief flashes of time. Speaking of lack of combat, the first boss battle doesn't even kick in until level nine — and it sucks! You just lead this idiot into some traps, shoot him, and then hide behind a pillar until all of your energy replenishes.

Multiplayer is slightly better simply because you can actually attack everybody and take control of a Nightwalker. It's just sad that being allowed to fight is one of the few positive things a game has going for it. —BRYAN

DEEP THOUGHTS WITH VAMPIRES

The following is an actual conversation between two Nightwalkers in Vampire Rain.

"I love the night."
"I hate the rain."
"The night is as heavy and sweet."
"But I hate the rain."
"The rain will eventually stop."
"The night will eventually become day."

BOTTOM LINE 3

> Concept: A poor man's Splinter Cell set in a rainy vampire town.

> Graphics: Xbox caliber textures, character models, and rain effects.

> Sound: You might as well pop in a random meditation CD, that's all you'll hear anyway (outside of cheesy voice acting).

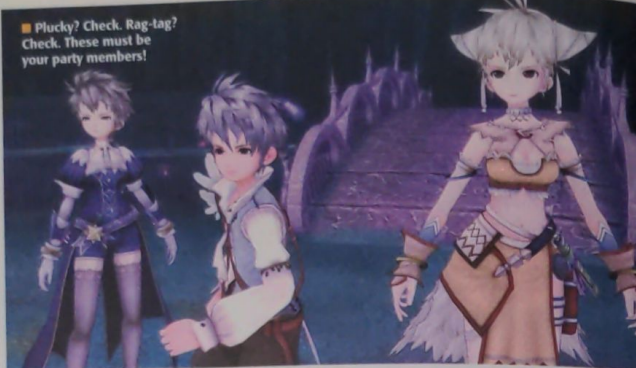
> Playability: A bad camera, useless weapons, and endless cheap deaths will bring out your game rage.

> Entertainment: One ridiculous conversation (see sidebar) is the only enjoyment you'll get out of this game.

> Replay Value: Low.

Second Opinion 2.75

Vampire Rain begins with a fairly lengthy training level that asks the player to do nothing more than mimic the movements of a teammate. This stage is uneventful, beyond boring, and a horrible way to begin a game. Whoever created the saying "It can only get better from here" is a liar. After the miserable first stage, you can almost see Vampire Rain's pain-inducing gameplay crumble right before your very eyes. Most of the levels are so blocky that you'd think they were prototyped with LEGOs. I've seen broken AI before, but nothing this slow. One of the vampires that detected me just ran around in circles. And let's not forget how often you run into invisible walls, or how inefficient your weapons are. In concept, Vampire Rain sounds like a Top Gun film, but its gameplay is of the same quality as Vampire in Brooklyn. —REINER



NIGHT AND DAY

The use of light and darkness on the battlefield is one of the key strategic elements in *Eternal Sonata*. Your characters will have access to different special moves – with varying range and attack power – depending on whether they are in the light or shadows. Not only do you need to consider your own position before mounting an attack, but also where the monsters stand. Many of them take on entirely different forms in the dark, or even emanate light to prevent you from using shadow attacks near them. Whenever you enter a new battlefield, the first thing you should do is take note of where the shadows fall.



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Make gamers say, "Wow, Chopin totally kicked ass! Music history rules!"

> **Graphics:** All of the characters, environments, and spell effects are imbued with a gorgeous and distinctive style.

> **Sound:** Some nice use of piano music (no surprise there), but several character voices are incredibly grating.

> **Playability:** Generally solid with a few shaky spots when it comes to hit detection and the use of secondary special moves.

> **Entertainment:** It's fun to fight and explore, but the story and characters could be more engrossing.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion 8

Eternal Sonata makes a case for why it should be considered a role-playing epic, but it also shows that the human brain can only endure so many long-winded "meaning of life" sermons before it will melt and drain through the ears. While offering brilliant moments of intrigue, the game's story is mostly preachy, pretentious, and in some cases, so jarring that you'll wonder if someone accidentally replaced part of the plot with a history professor's slideshow lecture. This story can be irritating, but thankfully, this RPG finds other ways to dazzle you. The inventive battle system strikes the perfect balance between button-mashing fun and do-or-die strategizing. With enjoyable combat paving the way, field encounters rarely get old, the boss battles leave you gasping and saying "that was incredible," and you always look forward to a battle's conclusion to see if a new power has been unlocked. *Eternal Sonata* also delivers a level of visual grandeur that will make you applaud the technological advances that games have made over the years. It may be lacking in one key area, but this is one quest that you won't want to miss. —REINER

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PLAYSTATION 3

Lair

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** FACTOR 5 > **RELEASE** AUGUST 14 > **ESRB** T

FLYING WITH CLIPPED WINGS

In The Lord of the Rings' battle of Helm's Deep, what if it wasn't Gandalf and his cavalry that showed up to save the day, but rather one lone dragon and his rider? Most of the wars in Lair unfold with huge armies banging on castle gates, only to be foiled by a fire-breathing demon from the skies. Now, this may sound like the ultimate adventure—a scenario that every nerd across the globe has dreamed at least once. Unfortunately, in Lair's case, the amazing sensation of flying saddleback on a death-dealing dragon is greatly marred by the wobbly motion-based controls.

As it turns out, Factor 5 knew that players would have difficulty controlling these dragons, which is evidenced in painfully slow speed (hot air balloons may drift faster), and the skill-stealing lock-on targeting system. If you hold down the lock-on button, you will not only establish a sure fire hit on your closest adversary, you will swirl and bank with it without having to adjust your aim. At this point, you just have to jam on the fire button to mow down the attacker. Hit auto-target button again, and the next opponent will suffer a quick death—a death that always felt cheap to me. It's borderline god mode.

Where Lair lacks any form of grace in its flight or intensity

in its firefights, it does set the stage for battles that are the very definition of epic. As catapults pound castle walls, and thousands of soldiers collide on the battlefield, the sky is a flurry of dragons spewing fire and ice. What it all boils down to, however, is you feeling foolish to be a part of these epic events—mostly because a dragon that flew this poorly would never be allowed to participate in battle; it would be back in the village pulling a plow in the fields, or doing stupid tricks for scraps at the bar.

There's a hint of Rogue Squadron (Factor 5's most famed work) in Lair's blood, but it mostly comes out in the soundtrack and the mission structuring. The Zen of shooting down TIE Fighters is sadly nowhere to be found, which is a shame because you can clearly see that the potential is there. Without a workable control scheme (standard analog movement is not an option), I fear most people will find themselves flustered beyond belief with the game like I was.—REINER

■ The dragons look great, but good luck controlling them



BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** The creators of Star Wars: Rogue Squadron show us that dragons are not nearly as cool as X-Wings.

> **Graphics:** The battles span as far as the eye can see, and the high level of detail (especially when viewed in native 1080p) never ceases to amaze.

> **Sound:** The pulse-pounding score oddly sounds like it belongs in Star Wars, but definitely gets the blood pumping. This is also one of the few games out there to support 7.1 surround sound.

> **Playability:** This is where Lair plummets. The motion-based controls just don't work as well as they need to for an intense aerial combat game.

> **Entertainment:** Lair's disappointing critical path comes to an end at approximately six to eight hours, but getting all the gold medals will take some time.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

As a fulfillment of childhood dragon-flying fantasies, Lair triumphs through its phenomenally huge conflicts and vicious vertigo-inducing midair duels. Your dragon is like a nuclear bomb in a knife fight, capable of turning the tide in a conflict of thousands. Your score is actually the tonnage of destruction left behind in the wake of your passing. Variety fills the gameplay experience, from a remarkably well thought out switch-up of mission styles to the evocative orchestral score that weaves its way through the game. This variety extends to the numerous combat moves available in a fight—enough to offer excitement in what is otherwise a relatively simple gameplay mechanic. I'm not a fan of the color palette for the game, filled as it is with so many earthy hues that objects just don't stand out on the screen at times. While the motion controls for flight are unique, they're also the weakest aspect of the title—it was several hours into the game before I felt like I had a firm handle on moving around. Even so, Rogue Squadron fans would know this was a Factor 5 game without seeing the logo—it's not the longest ride, but you'll be coming back again and again for those brief flashes of gameplay brilliance.—MILLER



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XBOX 360 LIVE

Wii Mario Strikers Charged

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIICONNECT24) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NEXT LEVEL
> GAMES > RELEASE JULY 30 > ESRB E10+



■ Hmm, nothing out of the ordinary here

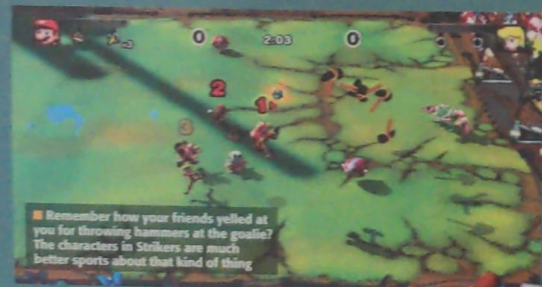
SORE SPORT

Regions scream as Mario storms a scorched, almost war-torn field. Shells fly in all directions knocking over his opponents before he grows massive and flattens a few more underfoot. Then something truly amazing happens: Mario is absorbed by an aura of white light, which sends him 30 feet into the air where he rains down a volley of fireballs. If I didn't have the pictures to prove it, you might not believe I was talking about a soccer game. Then again, I have trouble thinking of this explosion of Nintendo madness—thinly veiled by pseudo-sports rules—as a soccer game. Sadly, unlike some of Mario's similar sports ventures (i.e. Mario Kart, Mario Tennis), I had trouble falling in love with the Mario Strikers series, and Charged does nothing to change that.

It seems the goal for Strikers has always been to keep things short and intense, and to this end Charged succeeds. Most games last only three minutes, and the small fields keep the action pretty close. All 10 captains have their own super-abilities such as DK's area-clearing ground smash, or Peach's time-stopping freeze frame, but classic Mario powerups like shells and

bananas can be used by anyone. If all that wasn't enough, each field has its own set of obstacles to face. One might have you dodging falling Thwomps while another sees a tornado crossing the field with a tractor or cow in tow. Sometimes you feel like you're not just trying to win a game, you're trying to survive the chaos.

The problem is—despite everything mentioned above—the game isn't that fun. While Charged is an improvement over the original, it still piles on so much craziness that it buries itself with simplistic gameplay. Your AI teammates are useless, and getting hit by a random object when you are about to score is frustrating. There isn't much to keep you playing unless you like the multiplayer, which you can play online this time around. The online matches I played managed to keep the action pretty smooth, but you will have to exchange friend codes ahead of time if that's really your thing. Like that kid in preschool who kept changing the rules while you played, Mario Strikers Charged is amusing for awhile, but eventually you'll want to play a game you understand.—BEN



■ Remember how your friends yelled at you for throwing hammers at the goalie? The characters in Strikers are much better sports about that kind of thing

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> Concept: Insanity. Mario style. Oh yeah, and something kind of a bit like soccer

> Graphics: Some games just can't be bothered with fancy things like graphics. Strikers is one of those games.

> Sound: Getting the crowd to chant your name is one of the more rewarding aspects of play

> Playability: What's up with the lack of multiple save files on Nintendo systems recently? Come on, guys, it's just annoying

> Entertainment: On-field anarchy creates a thrilling experience, but one that is ultimately lacking the finer details

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Despite the changes made to this series, it remains no more relevant than if you released an NS4 title in 2007. The addition of Mega Saves is a smart feature that utilizes the motion sensor controller, and giving more power to your side kids creates teamwork. The problem with this title, however, is a fundamental one. When I'm leery to play a "power up" because it might negatively affect me as well as my opponent, that's when a game stops being a competitive game and starts becoming Mario Party. Is that the magic of Nintendo? Well, I don't believe in fairy tales. Strikers' rampant randomness in the disguise of gameplay—whether it's a goalie save, catch-up AI, or said power ups—is simply lame. Like many of Nintendo's so-called sports titles, this franchise won't be good until it puts in the effort to be more than just adequate.—KATO



Wii Pokémon Battle Revolution

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA WIICONNECT24) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO
> DEVELOPER GENIUS SONORITY > RELEASE JUNE 25 > ESRB E

CAN WE GO HOME NOW?

Welcome to the sun-drenched tropical paradise of Pokétopia. We're so pleased that you could come and join us. Come experience the natural wonderland where trainers gather from around the world to do battle. Of course, it's probably best if you don't explore the island. Please stick to the designated Colosseums for the safety of you and your Pokémon. Pokétopia is a laid back island, so you won't find any exciting stories told here. Besides, you're on vacation; you don't want to be bothered with too much excitement. Pokétopia is about relaxing to the thrill of near-unending Pokémon trainer battle after Pokémon trainer battle.

Feel free to make use of our state-of-the-art Wi-Fi connections in every room, as this is the first Nintendo vacation resort where you will be able to play against other people online. And don't forget to bring your Nintendo DS with you on your island getaway. Not only because you will have to use rental Pokémon if you don't import your critters from Diamond or Pearl, but because you will also want a good game to play when you get bored at wonderful Pokétopia.

Sure, Pokétopia might sound a lot like the trips you took to Pokémon Stadium 1&2 or that weekend at Pokémon Colosseum. That's because this is the same trip, we've just repainted the signs and moved to a different system. But just listen to what *GI Travel Magazine* said about our beautiful resort, "Pokétopia is one of the most boring trips I've ever been forced to take. If I hadn't been paid to go, I would have punched my travel agent."—BEN



BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> Concept: Pokémon battle other Pokémon! Yeah, that's it

> Graphics: Bleh.

> Sound: The announcer may have only two phrases for every action. "The red trainer has only one remaining Pokémon."

> Playability: Don't worry about getting confused. There is actually a mini tutorial that teaches you how to point the freaking Wii remote. Fantastic!

> Entertainment: Not a whole lot of value here. Only the hardest of the hardcore Pokéheads will find this entertaining for long—or for short, even

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 6

The primary reason anyone will be playing PBR is to see their stable of Pokémon that they've been leveling up all summer in Diamond/Pearl battle it out in full 3D. On this very base level, the game gets it done. Local DS connectivity battles and online fights are a quick and fun diversion, but they quickly lose their luster (especially since the DS Pokémon games already facilitate these modes). For those who don't have a DS and Diamond/Pearl, PBR is an empty shell of a game full of endless dry colosseum battles and little to work for outside of trainer accessories. But even Pokémon diehards will find little to keep them interested once they get past the glossy presentation.—BRYAN

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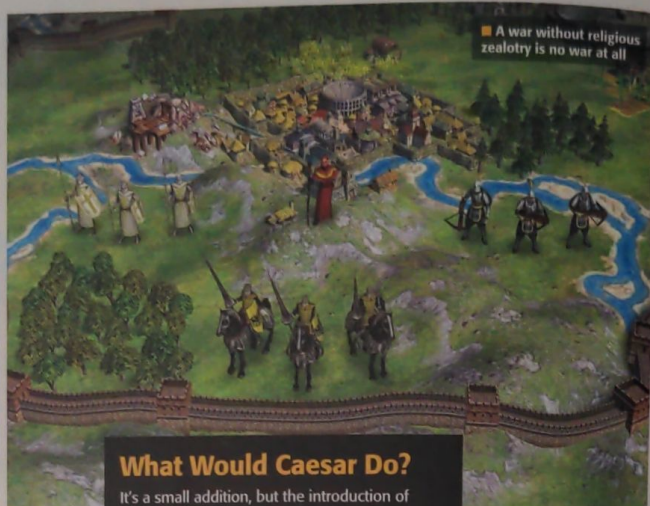
XBOX 360 LIVE

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■ Blimps! Woot!



■ A war without religious zealotry is no war at all

What Would Caesar Do?

It's a small addition, but the introduction of random events that put players between a rock and a hard place adds a personal touch to the often sterile business of government. One such quandary had the offspring of two feuding noble houses from a nearby rival seeking asylum and the freedom to marry in my empire. The twist was that they were having a Buddhist (my state religion) ceremony while their native land followed Hinduism. My choices ran the gamut from giving the proverbial middle finger to my rival and declaring a national holiday – which would score big points with other Buddhist nations, make my whole population happier, and likely provoke a war – to sending mere well wishes to minimize the diplomatic penalty.

Wonders, units, and buildings now supplement the existing tech, giving espionage a broad base of support across all of the game's layers.

Corporations have also been added. As a function of the late game (you need to research the Corporations tech to enable them), these constructs allow another vector of interaction with your rivals outside of warfare. Corporations work much like a religion in that they spread from city to city via the Corporate Executive unit, but have more varied effects, like culture or production bonuses.

Finally, Beyond the Sword includes several new scenarios if you should tire of the base game. These vary wildly in gameplay style, from a tactical RPG to space colonization. Unfortunately, the quality swings up and down as well; I found myself coming back to vanilla Civ IV after a few hours no matter how novel a scenario seemed at first. That's as much a

commentary on the excellence of the base game as it is an indictment of the alternate styles, though.

Beyond the Sword is unquestionably one of the best expansion packs I've ever played, and not just because the original release is so strong. The amount of content it adds, and the quality of those additions, is top-notch. This kind of massive depth, smooth polish, and unending replayability is what PC gaming is all about. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** Make Civilization IV better than ever by integrating espionage into the core game and adding a ton of new factions and scenarios

> **Graphics:** Looks great for a strategy game, but the true genius is in the way it presents pertinent information

> **Sound:** As always, the music is some of the best in the business

> **Playability:** If I were a professor, I'd teach entire courses on this interface. I'm not joking

> **Entertainment:** A brilliant expansion to the best strategy game in years. Any further questions?

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **9.5**

I already considered Civ to be the de facto standard in strategy games. Now that Firaxis found a way to give teeth to those who prefer the diplomatic approach to government in Beyond the Sword, that opinion has only grown stronger. Instead of sharpening the tip of my spear and crushing my rivals face to face every time, I used the more subtle new tools of espionage and corporate influence to stay ahead of the game. Why create bloodshed with an already struggling neighboring empire when I can just throw a wrench into its weak production and spread word of my country's glory with a few well-entrenched spies? Tactics such as these allowed me to concentrate my armed forces where they were truly needed. The game offers a dozen diverse playable scenarios as well, but the real fun is to be had in using these new tools to become the greatest two-faced civilization on earth. —BERTZ



PC

Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS GAMES > **RELEASE** JULY 23 > **ESRB** E10+

BOW TO THE MASTERS

In my view, there is no argument that Sid Meier's Civilization IV is the pinnacle of the modern strategy genre. I'd go so far as to make a case for it as the best strategy video game of all time, and so it is with great pleasure that I report Beyond the Sword is outstanding in every sense of the word.

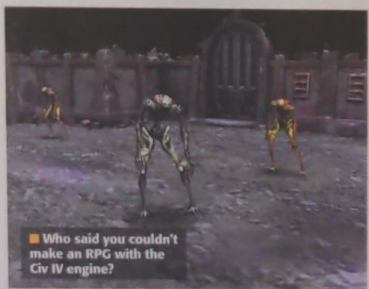
The espionage system introduced in Beyond

the Sword is skillfully integrated into the very core of Civilization IV's complex gameplay. Developing intelligence and counter-intelligence networks is an expensive proposition, so espionage takes resources away from your treasury, culture, or research efforts. To justify such heavy investment, the benefits had better be worth it, and they

certainly can be. Trashing enemy production, inciting their population to revolt, and stealing resources – traditional activities for the genre, to be sure – and preventing the same from happening to you couldn't be more important. The intelligence benefits, which range from seeing enemy demographic information to the current production in their cities, are

immeasurably helpful as well. It's not necessary to delve too deeply into espionage, but it's a nice additional non-combat vector to spread your influence. The UI could be better, though.

To support all this spy stuff, several new advances have been woven into the tech tree. More importantly, a huge number of additional Wonders, National



■ Who said you couldn't make an RPG with the Civ IV engine?



■ What are warp lanes but roads in space?



■ New units fill in the gaps in certain epochs

PSP

Dead Head Fred

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** D3PUBLISHER > **DEVELOPER** VICIOUS CYCLE > **RELEASE** AUGUST 21 > **ESRB** M

■ It's not what it looks like



BRAINDEAD

I'm all for game developers pushing the boundaries of what's acceptable subject matter for the medium. However, dropping a few F-bombs and making sex jokes about zombies in no way justifies the awful combat mechanics and uninspired puzzles that make up Dead Head Fred's gameplay.

This third-person action title has players take on the role of Fred, a spunky P.I. who got himself killed and reanimated while investigating a shady nuclear power plant in a sleepy rural town. Mad scientists, nympho zombies, and enterprising mutants round out the cast of characters, with frequent guest appearances by backwoods psychos and nameless undead for Fred to beat up on. It's a unique and compelling setting, but the act of playing the game is drab and repetitive.

Brawling your way through this title's Tim Burton-esque dystopian landscape is entertaining on a very basic level, but the utterly uninteresting challenges you face fail to engage any of the player's higher brain functions. Killing the same enemy with the same attacks that use the same animations in a slightly different room

loses its luster after the fifth or sixth repetition when the act of fighting is as formulaic and boring as it is here.

Collecting different heads and utilizing the various powers they grant you could have been a cool mechanic if the level design took advantage of it. Sadly, it doesn't. Rather than opening up options by giving the player a diverse toolbox of abilities, the head powers serve primarily as one-shot gimmicks to overcome arbitrary obstacles.

Even so, Dead Head Fred is hardly broken. Beating up enemies and stealing their heads works, but is rarely compelling. Navigating bite-sized environments is easy to do, but almost never offers a sense of exploration or accomplishment. The occasionally clever dialogue and intriguing visual style just aren't enough to save this title from its own mediocrity. —ADAM



■ This boss seems to have been made specifically to expose the camera's flaws



BOTTOM LINE **6**

> **Concept:** Punch your way to vengeance while making snarky adult-oriented quips

> **Graphics:** Aside from repetitive enemy models, this is a great showcase for the PSP's capabilities

> **Sound:** Good voice work for the main character throws the awful supporting cast into sharp relief

> **Playability:** Slow, sluggish, and shoddy barely begin to describe the combat

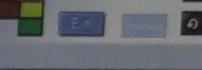
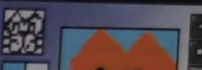
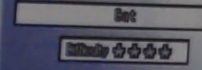
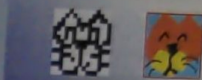
> **Entertainment:** With decent gameplay this could've been a cult hit. As is, it's more Troopie and Juliet and less Rocky Horror Picture Show

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion **6**

I really wanted to like Dead Head Fred. It's got an interesting and unique cast, great voice acting, and a stylish look. But, jeez, it just doesn't feel like developer Vicious Cycle knew how to make it all into fun gameplay. You'll spend most of the game wandering around, disoriented by the awful camera and repeated environments. The head switching mechanic could have been cool, but it's primarily used for puzzles no more complex than the whole "use five missiles on red doors" tactic from Metroid. Combat's mostly about punching guys until you can beat them even though they want you to use counters and specials. It's too bad old Freddy didn't live up to expectations. —BRYAN

Original



NINTENDO DS

Picross DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 5-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI CONNECTION) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** JUPITER > **RELEASE** JULY 30 > **ESRB** E



UNDERGROUND CLASSIC

I'm ashamed to admit that I've never played the original Mario's Picross (released for the old-school monochromatic Game Boy "brick" way back in 1995). However, I always heard great things – Andy and former GI editor Justin Leeper always proselytized for the game to whoever would listen. Boy, were they right. This game is a stone classic of the puzzle genre; one I'd put it right up there with any and all corners, including Tetris.

The concept (as with all great puzzlers) is exceedingly simple in concept yet endlessly complex in practice. You have a large grid of squares. Each line and column is marked with numbers, which denote series of blocks that appear

in each. For example, a row marked "3 2" has one group of three blocks and one group of two blocks. Each group must be separated by at least one blank square. Now, I realize this description might seem a little convoluted, but trust me – after five minutes in the tutorial the basic principles will be second nature.

Like Sudoku or crossword puzzles, this is one of those endlessly replayable games. The solution is always there, right in front of you. It's just a matter of using logic and careful planning to place the block correctly. In addition the brilliant main modes, you can also design your own Picross boards to share with friends, play online against four other competitors, or download grids from the original Game Boy cartridge. That's a lot of gameplay for a great bargain of \$20, making this one of the best handheld games of the year, hands down. —MATT

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** A brilliantly conceived puzzle game where you use numbers and logic to decode simple dot-matrix pictures

> **Graphics:** Well, the pictures aren't exactly Dutch Masters, but you know, they are cute enough and the interface is very understandable

> **Sound:** Extremely unmemorable

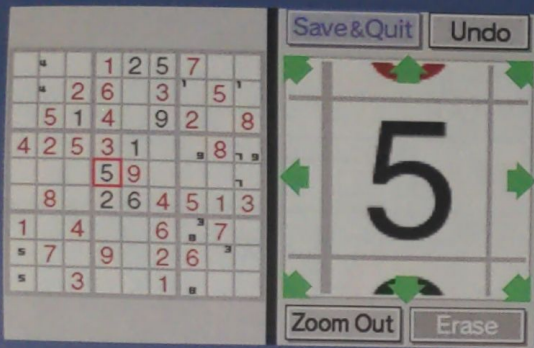
> **Playability:** The touch controls are an interesting option, but as the puzzles get more complex you'll want to revert to the classic d-pad and button scheme

> **Entertainment:** I'm so happy Nintendo resurrected this title – it's truly one of the greatest puzzle games of all time

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **9**

I was thoroughly addicted to this game – even as it gave me a brain hemorrhage with its grids. Some of the harder puzzles in this title leave you scratching your head, wondering how you're supposed to figure things out without just guessing. But at least there's a hint system. Regardless of difficulty, this is a title for everyone, and it easily shows why old school Game Boy players laud it. It's filled with features, including the ability to create your own puzzles. Picross may not have the variety of some current puzzle compilations which offer more quantity like Brain Buster Puzzle Pak, but Sudoku et al. fans should not miss this title. —KATO



NINTENDO DS

Brain Age 2: More Training In Minutes A Day

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** AUGUST 20 > **ESRB** E

THE ORIGINAL IN A FIELD OF IMITATORS

The first Brain Age helped the Nintendo DS become what it is today, both in the U.S. and overseas. Its success has not been overlooked by other companies hoping to cash in, and a flood of "me too" brain games have bombarded the market with limited results. Brain Age 2 brings back the mix of simplicity, sophistication, and fun to the game space that others are sorely lacking.

Math is still the primary tool of Dr. Ryuta. Players will continuously subtract the same number from a larger number until it reaches zero, or they'll figure out correct change by tapping bills and coins. These math problems and more are just as tricky as before, but some will remind you a little too much of previous games. For example, the race game (where you keep track of a sprinter's place as competitors fly past) is almost exactly the same as the house challenge from Brain Age 1.

Other challenges, like memorizing a grid of 25 numbers or reading an upside down, backwards clock, will really test your mettle. But I preferred more fun activities like playing piano alongside some sheet music or figuring out word scrambles (kind of an animated Jumble from the back of a newspaper).

Dr. Mario fans will be halfway pleased with the addition of Virus Breaker this time around. The good news is that you can play as long as you want and use the touch screen to drag and rotate pills. The bad news is that the playing grid has been reduced in order to make everything bigger onscreen, you have to earn a daily stamp before you can play it (at least in the first several weeks), and there is no versus play at all. However, the four other multiplayer games can all be shared from a single cart and are entertaining enough.

In the end, Brain Age 2 uses the same formula from the first game with some different variables thrown in. Your opinion of the original Brain Age will have to sort out whether that's a good or bad thing. —BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** A new batch of minigames and sudoku puzzles with a simplified Dr. Mario game thrown in

> **Graphics:** Almost all of the visual assets are reused from the first game

> **Sound:** The train still makes a choo-choo noise when you tap on it

> **Playability:** Handwriting recognition can still be tricky at times, but voice recognition is flawless

> **Entertainment:** Brain Age's freshness appeal isn't as strong this time around, but fans will have plenty here to keep them busy

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

The original Brain Age proved to be a powerfully addicting handheld game, its replayability buoyed considerably by the beefy Sudoku puzzle mode. In Brain Age 2, Sudoku is back, as is a stripped down version of Dr. Mario called Virus Buster. The rest of the formula remains essentially the same, but with an all-new test of mental acuity. While it's definitely got the same charm, it did seem that—in finding ways to change up a fairly simple template—the developers have been forced to create some contests that seem unduly counter-intuitive. However, this increased challenge will be welcome to hardcore fans that have long since brought their brain age down to 20. Despite my minor concerns, however, this is yet another excellent DS title for a system that is already home to more than a few. —MATT

PSP

Jeanne d'Arc

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** LEVEL 5 > **RELEASE** AUGUST 21 > **ESRB** T



A TRIUMPHANT CALL TO ARMS

I'm an unabashed fan of developer Level 5 (Rogue Galaxy) and Jeanne d'Arc is proof yet again that this studio can succeed at whatever it puts its mind to. Leave it to them to put their own spin on The Hundred Years War that includes monsters (apart from the English) and a fat frog—and that's not a derogatory comment on the French. There literally is a talking frog in the game.

Level 5 hardly reinvents the wheel of strategic, turn-based grid combat, but instead offers a well-thought out title stuffed with combat and character options—and what Level 5 game would be complete without the chance to combine items to create new, more powerful objects? The game presents numerous combat situations with win/lose conditions based around Joan of Arc's move to restore the Dauphin to the French throne and kick out the English. My favorite

part of the title is that it gives you the freedom to envision your best strategies. Characters' affinities and weapons can be swapped and moves can be tested out before their execution, so you feel like you're bound less by rules and more your own ideas—and there are some battles where you're going to need some good ones.

This title does what all of Level 5 games do—it lets you loose in an inviting environment armed with a variety of tools at your disposal. Whether it's forming bunkered defensive formations with your cast of characters or using Joan's Armet powers to lay waste to a board of enemies, this is an alternate history lesson that you should not miss. —KATO



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Level 5 makes a masterful try at turn-based grid combat

> **Graphics:** Classic, vibrant Level 5 graphics and nice cinematic cutscenes

> **Sound:** Som of zee charactahs tok wit outrageous French accents

> **Playability:** This game gives you everything you need to succeed in battle

> **Entertainment:** Easily a worthwhile pickup for any strategy or Level 5 fan

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

When a proven RPG developer like Level 5 takes its expertise and applies it to grid-based strategy, good things are bound to happen. Jeanne d'Arc, the company's first foray into the genre, holds its own even against the likes of Fire Emblem. It isn't quite as merciless as that series (characters are revived after each battle with full health), but Jeanne d'Arc finds other ways to add tension to a fight. Jeanne's once-per-battle transformation into a holy avenger needs to be used judiciously, and there is a thrill to brandishing your custom-made weapons. The well-balanced and exceptionally fun combat is a must-play for strategy fans, providing you don't mind a ridiculous alternate history angle. —JOE

PSP

Brave Story: New Traveler

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** KOEI > **DEVELOPER** GAME REPUBLIC > **RELEASE** JULY 31 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 7.25

The PSP has seen its fair share of generic RPGs, but you'd be making a mistake to lump Brave Story in with that sub-par crowd. In addition to being one of the best-looking PSP titles out there, the game has a host of small surprises. The turn-based battles are stylish, and even feature team attacks and recharging magic points. There is also a collection sidequest involving goalfinch battles, which are basically cuter and less gruesome cockfights. Brave Story may ultimately be a Dragon Quest pretender, but at least it does some fun stuff within its fairly conventional framework. —JOE

NINTENDO DS

Brothers in Arms DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** CAMELOFT > **RELEASE** JUNE 19 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

It's a shame how this game turned out, because when I first saw it I thought BIA looked amazing. Technically, it still does look amazing; the graphics are great for a DS title. It's too bad that the game feels so bad. Literally, the game feels like a mess. My hand cramped shooting with L and aiming with a stylus. That's not the only problem, either. Gameplay is overly simplistic and aiming is too stiff (with no sensitivity setting). I have to give the game a few extra points for its graphics, occasional mindless fun, and bringing WWII multiplayer to the DS, but the controls are such a disaster that this game is far from good. —BEN

NINTENDO DS

Heroes of Mana

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** BROWNIE BROWN > **RELEASE** AUGUST 14 > **ESRB** E10+

HANG 'EM FROM THE MANA TREE

It is too bad that some gamers will play Heroes of Mana under the impression that they will be getting a handheld approximation of the real-time strategy experience. I concede that many of the concepts in this game are similar to those in an RTS; you harvest resources, build structures, and generate units to fight. Sadly, these ideas flounder so completely in execution that any resemblance to a real strategy title is lost.

The most important component to hit the chopping block is your control over the units. The only command you can issue is attack-move, so if a specific enemy changes location while your guys are in transit, they'll reach their destination and stand there like gits. That's assuming that they even arrive, since the pathfinding is so laughably ter-

rible. It's frustrating and baffling to tell your group of heroes to move straight ahead, and instead they spread out every which way like they're looking for some kind of morons-only shortcut.

I want to clarify that very few of my issues with the game stem from the stylus-controlled interface. Selecting units works surprisingly well, and it was a good choice to use a centralized location for structures (instead of

a sprawling base). Issuing the orders isn't the problem, it's what the game decides to do (or not do) with them.

Even if you consider yourself a fan of the series, don't waste your time here. There was a time when the Mana name meant something, but this is a disappointing entry that drags the franchise through the mud. —JOE



BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Take all of the strategy out of the RTS framework. At least it's still real-time

> **Graphics:** The Mana art style translates fairly well, but the sprites all get lost in the action

> **Sound:** The soundtrack isn't exactly classic, but there are some decent battle tunes

> **Playability:** Technically, this game is capable of being played. I wouldn't recommend it

> **Entertainment:** I chuckled on several occasions, but more out of disbelief than enjoyment

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 5

I've been trying to figure out what I don't like about this game, but what's been clear since I stopped playing was that I just didn't have any fun. The touch screen controls feel forced and obtuse, and battles are short and too easy. It is almost as if the developer knew how frustrating the controls could be, then tried to minimize the suffering. Heroes are all about having your battles and troops in the right place at the right time, since they just auto-attack anything in sight. Unfit for kids or adults, I don't know who this game was meant to appeal to. —MILLER

PSP

Monster Hunter Freedom 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** AUGUST 28 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 7

For a handheld, the production values in Monster Hunter Freedom 2 seem pretty high. I like the art style in particular, and the game is even laugh-out-loud funny on occasion. Problem is, a couple of hours in you realize that impressive graphics and great atmosphere are all this game really has to show. Missions are fairly repetitive and directionless, and the load times are a little too long. MHP is, at times, so slow it might put you to sleep if you're not careful. I just wish this game's world were wrapped around some truly awesome gameplay. As it stands, it's like a promising Christmas present that turns out to be one of grandma's sweaters. —BEN

PSP

Smash Court Tennis 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** JULY 10 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

While it's traditionally been overlooked in favor of Top Spin or Virtua Tennis, Namco's Smash Court Tennis has been a strong franchise over the years. This PSP version excels with solid fundamentals, crisp graphics, a deep character development and career mode, and some inventive minigames that feature Namco properties like Pac-Man and Galaga. The lineup of pros has a few holes (the Williams sisters are MIA), but they've got the world's greatest player, Roger Federer, plus Nadal and female standouts Henin and Sharapova. A very solid contender that will give PSP tennis fans more than their fill of racket action. Highly recommended, although online multiplayer would be a welcome addition in the next sequel. —MATT



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For June 2007 Based On Units Sold

MARIO PARTY 8 (WII)



Sometimes it's a bad idea to play games when you're tired. The combination of sleep deprivation and colorful stimuli can create some very powerful hallucinations. Since nothing wipes us out like E3, and few things are more colorful or stimulating than hanging out with Mario, compiling Charts this month was a lively experience. We've dubbed it the perfect storm. Mario Party was just the beginning.

2 WII PLAY (WII)



Mario decided to continue hanging out with us as we played Wii Play. A friendly game of cow racing quickly turned sad when one of the scarecrows started chasing us, and Mario rode his cow so hard that he killed it. Then it turned into a zombie cow and he put the beast out of its misery with a Nintendo Zapper. Truly odd, we know, because the Zapper isn't even out yet.

3 POKÉMON DIAMOND (DS)



Mario thought it would be a good idea to play something a little bit tamer, so we started up a game of Pokémon. There was a great deal of difficulty getting a match started because Mario spent two and a half hours trying to find a Pokémon that had a mustache. When we finally started up a battle against Mario, we chose Charizard and he chose to pelt us in the head with Pokéballs.

4 POKÉMON PEARL (DS)



Mario wanted to try his hand at breeding Pokémon. He combined a Clefairy with a Butterfree and called it a Butterfly. We didn't get it, but he thought it was hilarious. The problem was that the Pokémon began to propagate like tribbles, which wasn't nearly so bad until Mario decided to feed them after midnight, and they turned into something truly terrifying: Jamie Kennedy.

5 FORZA MOTORSPORT 2 (360)



By this point, the sweetestness* fairy of sleep was pleading with us to go to bed before our mind broke in half, but Mario threatened to kill us if we didn't play with him some more. So we chose to play one race in Forza. It turns out Mario is a pretty crazy driver. He kept throwing bananas out his side window, and when we cut him off, he threw a turtle at the back of our Nissan Skyline.

*Editor's note: not a real word

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Mario Party 8	2	Wii	7.25	05-07	\$49
2	Wii Play	5	Wii	7	02-07	\$49
3	Pokémon Diamond	1	DS	8.25	04-07	\$35
4	Pokémon Pearl	4	DS	8.25	04-07	\$35
5	Forza Motorsport 2	6	360	8.25	05-07	\$60
6	Guitar Hero II	10	PS2	9	11-06	\$80
7	Guitar Hero II	7	360	9.25	11-06	\$90
8	Pokémon Battle Revolution	N/A	Wii	5.75	06-07	\$49
9	Resident Evil 4	N/A	Wii	9.5	06-07	\$30
10	The Darkness	N/A	360	8.75	06-07	\$59
11	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 2	N/A	PS2	NA	06-07	\$40
12	Transformers: The Game	N/A	PS2	7.25	06-07	\$40
13	Tenchu Z	N/A	360	6.5	06-07	\$60
14	New Super Mario Bros.	16	DS	9.25	05-06	\$34
15	Tomb Raider: Anniversary	N/A	PS2	8.5	06-07	\$29
16	Super Paper Mario	11	Wii	9.5	04-07	\$50
17	Transformers: The Game	N/A	360	7.25	06-07	\$62
18	MLB '07: The Show	19	PS2	8.75	02-07	\$39
19	Big Brain Academy	N/A	Wii	7.5	06-07	\$49
20	Dirt	N/A	360	8	06-07	\$60

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	Wii
2	The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	DS
3	Ganbaru Watashi No Kakei Diary	DS
4	Wii Sports	Wii
5	DS Eye Training	DS
6	Wii Play	Wii
7	Chikasete! Chibi-Robo!	DS
8	Kirarin Revolution	DS
9	Monster Farm DS	DS
10	Rockman ZX Advent	DS



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	BioShock	N/A	360
2	Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword	N/A	DS
3	Picross DS	N/A	DS
4	Blue Dragon	N/A	360
5	The Darkness	1	360
6	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	N/A	Multi
7	Eternal Sonata	N/A	360
8	Jeanne d'Arc	N/A	PSP
9	World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	7	PC
10	Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s	5	PS2



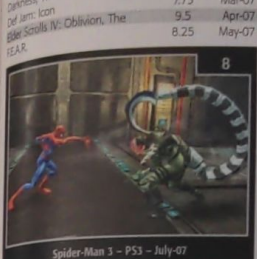
TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	2	\$37
2	World Of Warcraft	3	\$22
3	Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	4	\$49
4	The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar	1	\$51
5	The Sims 2 Seasons	6	\$29
6	Starcraft: Battle Chest	N/A	\$19
7	The Sims 2	5	\$35
8	3333 XP Games	9	\$10
9	The Sims 2 Celebration Stuff	7	\$18
10	Warcraft III Battle Chest	19	\$39



REVIEWSARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3



Ant Bully, The	8	Aug-07
Big Brain Academy	6.5	Apr-07
Cooking Mama: Cook Off	7.5	Jul-07
Dragonball Z Budokai Tenkai 2	7	Feb-07
Far Cry	8.75	Jan-07
Godfather: Blackhand Edition, The	8.75	Aug-07
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	7.75	Mar-07
Heatseeker	9.5	Apr-07
Kororipa: Marble Mania	8.25	May-07
Madden NFL 07	7.5	Jul-07
Mario Party 8	7.25	Jul-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	8.25	Jan-07
Medal of Honor: Vanguard	4	May-07
Mercury Meltdown	6.5	Jul-07
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	7.5	Jun-07
Prince of Persia: Rival Swords	8.5	May-07
Rayman Raving Rabbids	8.5	Jan-07
Resident Evil 4	9.5	Jul-07
Shrek the Third	5.25	Aug-07
Sonic and the Secret Rings	5.5	Apr-07
Spider-Man 3	6.5	Jul-07
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab	6.75	Feb-07
Super Paper Mario	8.5	Apr-07
Super Swing Golf	9.5	Jun-07
Surf's Up	8	Feb-07
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	6.5	Aug-07
TMNT	6.5	May-07
Trauma Center: Second Opinion	7.5	May-07
WarioWare: Smooth Moves	8.5	Jan-07
Wii Play	7	Mar-07
Wing Island	5	May-07

XBOX 360

Ant Bully, The	8	Aug-07
Ar Tonelico: Melody of Elmia	6.5	Apr-07
Arena Football: Road to Glory	6.5	Mar-07
Arthur and the Invisibles	7.5	Jul-07
Atelier Iris 3: Grand Phantasm	6	Mar-07
Burnout Dominator	7.5	Jul-07
Chulip	8	Feb-07
Dawn of Mana	8.5	Jun-07
Eragon	8.5	Mar-07
Ghost Rider	8.5	Mar-07
God of War II	8.5	Apr-07
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	7.5	May-07
GrimGrimoire	7.75	Aug-07
Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the '80s	8.25	Jul-07
Hot Shots Tennis	8.25	Jul-07
Lumines Plus	7.5	Apr-07
Medal of Honor: Vanguard	6	May-07
Meet the Robinsons	7	May-07
MLB 07: The Show	8.75	Apr-07
MVP 07 NCAA Baseball	7	Mar-07
NFL Street 3	7	Feb-07
Odin Sphere	8.5	Jul-07
Raw Danger	4.5	Jun-07
Rogue Galaxy	9	Jan-07
Sega Genesis Collection	8.5	Jan-07
Shield, The	4	Mar-07
Shining Force EXA	7.5	Apr-07
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3	8.5	Aug-07
Shrek the Third	5.25	Aug-07
Singstar Pop	8	May-07
Sopranos: Road to Respect, The	6	Feb-07
TMNT	7.5	May-07
Tomb Raider Anniversary	8.5	Jul-07
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	4	Jul-07
Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	8	Mar-07

PC

Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Battlestations: Midway	6.5	Mar-07
Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	8.5	May-07
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	Apr-07
Gothic 3	5	Feb-07
Halo 2	9	Aug-07
Heroes of Annihilated Empires	6	Feb-07
Heroes of Might & Magic V: Hammers of Fate	8	Feb-07
Infernal	4	Jun-07
Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar, The	8.5	Jul-07

Wii

Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Big Brain Academy	7.5	Aug-07
Cooking Mama: Cook Off	6.75	May-07
Dragonball Z Budokai Tenkai 2	5	Feb-07
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Sonic and the Secret Rings	5.5	Apr-07
Spider-Man 3	6.5	Jul-07
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab	6.75	Feb-07
Super Paper Mario	8.5	Apr-07
Super Swing Golf	9.5	Jun-07
Surf's Up	8	Feb-07
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	6.5	Aug-07
TMNT	6.5	May-07
Trauma Center: Second Opinion	7.5	May-07
WarioWare: Smooth Moves	8.5	Jan-07
Wii Play	7	Mar-07
Wing Island	5	May-07

Wii



Super Paper Mario - Wii - Jun-07

PLAYSTATION 2

hack//G.U. Vol.2: Reminiscence	5.75	Jul-07
Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Ar Tonelico: Melody of Elmia	6.75	Feb-07
Arena Football: Road to Glory	6.5	Apr-07
Arthur and the Invisibles	6.75	Mar-07
Atelier Iris 3: Grand Phantasm	6.5	Jun-07
Burnout Dominator	8	Apr-07
Chulip	3	Apr-07
Dawn of Mana	7	May-07
Eragon	6.25	Feb-07
Ghost Rider	6.75	Mar-07
God of War II	9.75	Apr-07
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	7.75	May-07
GrimGrimoire	7.75	Aug-07
Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the '80s	8.25	Aug-07
Hot Shots Tennis	8.25	Jul-07
Lumines Plus	7.5	Apr-07
Medal of Honor: Vanguard	6	May-07
Meet the Robinsons	7	May-07
MLB 07: The Show	8.75	Apr-07
MVP 07 NCAA Baseball	7	Mar-07
NFL Street 3	7	Feb-07
Odin Sphere	8.5	Jul-07
Raw Danger	4.5	Jun-07
Rogue Galaxy	9	Jan-07
Sega Genesis Collection	8.5	Jan-07
Shield, The	4	Mar-07
Shining Force EXA	7.5	Apr-07
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3	8.5	Aug-07
Shrek the Third	5.25	Aug-07
Singstar Pop	8	May-07
Sopranos: Road to Respect, The	6	Feb-07
TMNT	7.5	May-07
Tomb Raider Anniversary	8.5	Jul-07
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	4	Jul-07
Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	8	Mar-07

PC

Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Battlestations: Midway	6.5	Mar-07
Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	8.5	May-07
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	Apr-07
Gothic 3	5	Feb-07
Halo 2	9	Aug-07
Heroes of Annihilated Empires	6	Feb-07
Heroes of Might & Magic V: Hammers of Fate	8	Feb-07
Inferral	4	Jun-07
Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar, The	8.5	Jul-07



Halo 2 - PC - Aug-07

Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II - Rise of the Witch-King, The	8	Feb-07
Maelstrom	4	May-07
Medieval II: Total War	3.25	Jan-07
STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl	8.25	May-07
Shadowrun	6.5	Aug-07
Silverfall	6	May-07
Supreme Commander	9	Apr-07
Surf's Up	6.5	Aug-07
Titan Quest: Immortal Throne	8	May-07
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	7.5	Apr-07
World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	9.75	Apr-07

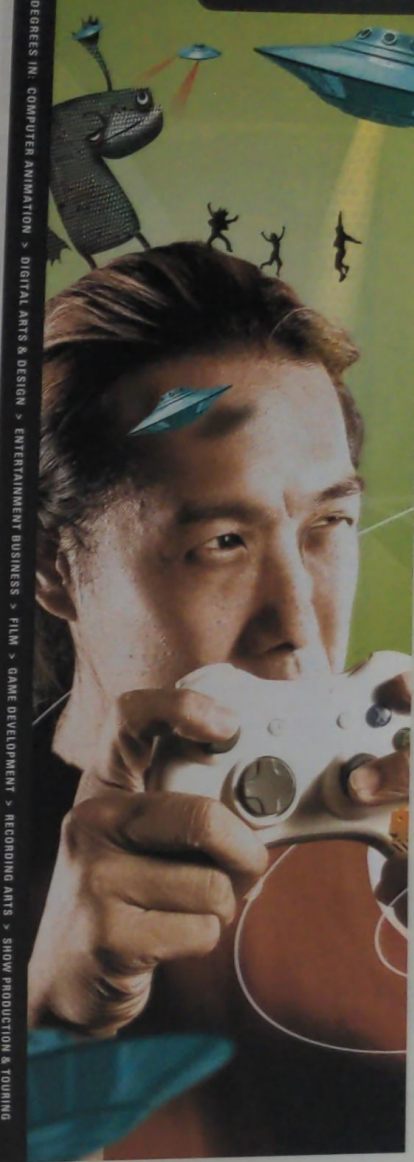
NINTENDO DS

Brain Buster Puzzle Pak	8	Apr-07
Cake Mania	6.5	May-07
Cookie & Cream	7	Aug-07
Death Jr. and the Science Fair of Doom	7	Jun-07
Diddy Kong Racing	7	Mar-07
Diner Dash	7.25	Jun-07
Dynasty Warriors DS: Fighter's Battle	6.5	Jul-07
Ethan Odyssey	6	Jun-07
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales	6.5	May-07
Honeycomb Beat	7	May-07
Hotel Dusk: Room 215	7	Mar-07
Izuna: Legend of the Unemployed Ninja	3.5	Apr-07
Kirby Squeak Squad	7.75	Feb-07
Korami Classics Series: Arcade Hits	7.75	May-07
Konducta	6.25	Feb-07
Lost in Blue 2	6.5	May-07
Lunar Knights	8	Apr-07
Meteos: Disney Magic	7.75	May-07
New York Times Crosswords	8.25	Aug-07
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Justice For All	8	Jan-07
Planet Puzzle League	8.25	Aug-07
Pogo Island	6.5	Apr-07
Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	8.25	Jun-07
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	8.25	May-07
Quicksport	7.5	Apr-07
SimCity DS	8.25	Aug-07
SNK vs. Capcom Card Fighters DS	6.5	Jul-07
Spectrobes	6.75	Jun-07
Time Ace	7	Jun-07
Touch of the Dead	6	Apr-07
Troncube	7.25	May-07
Wario: Master of Disguise	7.25	May-07

PSP

300: March to Glory	6.25	Apr-07
Aegis Eclipse	6	Jun-07
Generation of Chaos	7	May-07
After Burner: Black Falcon	6.75	Jun-07
Brooktown High	6	May-07
Call of Duty: Roads to Victory	7.5	Apr-07
Capcom Puzzle World	7	Apr-07
Chili Con Carnage	6.75	May-07
Coded Arms: Contagion	5.5	Jun-07
Cube	5	Jul-07
Driver 76	6	Aug-07
Dungeon Maker: Hunting Ground	8	Jan-07
Dungeon Siege: Throne of Agony	6	Aug-07
Dungeons and Dragons: Final Fantasy II Anniversary Edition	6	Aug-07
Final Fantasy: Anniversary Edition	7.5	May-07
Full Auto 2	7.25	May-07
Gurumin: A Monstrous Adventure	7	Apr-07
Innocent Life: A Futuristic Harvest Moon	7.25	Jul-07
Legend of Heroes III: Song of the Ocean, The	6	Mar-07
M.A.C.H.	6.5	May-07
Marvel Trading Card Game	9	Feb-07
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops	6	Mar-07
Monster Kingdom Jewel Summoner	8	Feb-07
Mortal Kombat: Unchained	8	Jul-07
ParaPara the Rapper	8	Jul-07
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	8.25	May-07
Rancher & Clark: Size Matters	3	Apr-07
Sid Meier's Pirates!	6.75	Feb-07
Sonic Rivals	6.5	Feb-07
Star Wars: Lethal Alliance	7	Aug-07
Tales of the World	4.5	Mar-07
Valhalla Knights	7.5	Feb-07
Warhammer: Battle for Aeterna	8.5	Apr-07
Warriors, The	8.5	Apr-07

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Lair

Dragon Flight School

By Julian Eggebrecht, president of Factor 5

There's so much more to Lair than Rohn's journey. To truly experience what the game has to offer, you should try to get a gold medal for each and every mission (This also unlocks the extras!). Here are some tips to help you improve your medal scores.

MOVE! OUR MEN NEED US!

To get the gold medals, you'll need some strategies that help you complete your objectives faster. Try these techniques to lower your time:

Pro Speed – Dash with a downward gesture on the Sixaxis controller. While coming out of the dash, tap X to flap your wings. During your dragon's second wing flap after the dash you can dash again. This will help you cover distances in the fastest way possible.

Dragon Ramming Speed – The button physical strike makes you dash toward an enemy dragon. This can be used to gain speed and close distances rapidly. Take advantage of this to get around the map and get to where the enemy is as quickly as possible.

Note: After initiating a Strike you can cancel by pressing the brake button before impact.

Rain and Burn – They don't call them burners for nothing! Perform a physical strike, and deploy a hearty use of your flame breath by holding before colliding with the enemy. This causes burn damage. Because this burn damage accumulates across all dragon combat modes, you will dispatch your enemies much faster.

Flame Breath in Pursuit Mode – While in pursuit mode use the brake button to slow down and get behind the enemy dragon and flame breath the dragon. Light him on fire and drop him faster!

Reverse Charge Fireball – The reverse charge fireball (the first fireball you shoot after letting your dragon's fire glands rest for a second) is 200 times more powerful than your smaller fireballs. Become a master of this technique and accuracy to dispatch targets with ease. After about one second you'll have maximum power.

Choose Your Fireball – Know which fireball is best against which enemies. Small fireballs are good against Ice & Wind Dragons and large fireballs are good against Bull & Dark Dragons.

Choosing the right power for the right target can drastically reduce your time. Don't forget to light objects on fire by holding if you get close to them as well.

Master Your Camera

Learn to control your cameras at all times. Think of playing Lair like playing a third person shooter. Where you point the camera you can interact with the target by locking on or by circle striking the enemy. Playing in this way cuts down on the time you spend tracking down your prey, and it looks awesome to boot!

Dragon on Your Tail – If you see fireballs on your wing, pull back on the right stick to look behind you and lock on to the enemy dragon to maneuver onto his tail or even hit him with a circle strike.

180 Bomber – You can perform a 180 during bombing mode or when carrying anything in your daws. This allows you to find your target faster.

PILE UP THE CARNAGE!

By far the most important skill to master if you want to go for the gold is how to maximize your carnage multiplier. Use these strategies and watch your position on the leaderboards rise!

Pursuit Mode to Fight Mode – Practice fighting medium and heavy dragons through each combat mode in succession to score extra carnage multipliers. To get into pursuit, you should lock on to your target with either L1 or R1 before initiating combat with .

Chain Combo King – You can really raise the multiplier with this technique! Find a group of Ice or Wind dragons flying close to one another. Target one, and then press to hit him with a physical strike. After impact, you have a short window of opportunity to find your next target. Tilt the controller to rotate the camera until another dragon gets targeted, and then press again. Kill enemy dragons in quick succession to increase your chain combo multiplier up to 4x. From there end your chain combo with a Pursuit Mode or Fight Mode on any of the other dragon types to increase your carnage multiplier up to 7x!

Maximum Multiplier – You can max out your carnage multiplier by performing chain combos on light dragons to a 4x multiplier, then striking a dark or bull dragon while activating rage mode to perform a takedown. This gives you a staggering 9x multiplier for the takedown carnage.



PS3

Mod World

MAJESTY



War Beast Pro Take Down – Take down a War Beast by flying underneath it to earn a pro carnage multiplier.

Manual Take Down – You will receive a higher carnage multiplier for activating rage manually and performing a take down kill by physically striking the dragon instead in using the Triangle take down prompt.

Rage for Medals – Being in rage mode increases your base multiplier by 2x, allows you to perform a takedown on bigger dragons, and slows down the world clock. Rage is one of the main keys to unlocking big medal scores.

Master Your Rage – Big carnage targets like catapults, ballistae, and rhinos fill your rage meter faster. Plan your combat strategies with this in mind to maximize your rage!

Rip & Tear Rage – Performing a rip and tear on objects like ballistae fill your rage meter faster than dispatching those targets normally due to the increased carnage multiplier.

GET DOWN THERE AND HELP OUR TROOPS! Here are some moves to help you maximize damage when you engage armies on the ground:

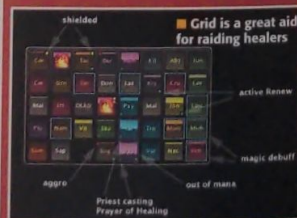
Ground Smash – During ground combat use a downward gesture (same as the Dash when in the air) to perform a ground smash that throws all nearby soldiers into the air.

Rage Strafe & Breath – Activating Rage Mode gives you unlimited Flame Breath, which can be used to strafe the battlefield and cook up a gourmet amount of troops!

Ring of Fire – In a dense group of troops on the ground, rotate the left analog stick in a 360 degree motion while performing a circular Flame Breath attack to quickly dispatch the army.

Inferno Quake – Land in a dense group of troops, perform a 360 flame breath attack followed by a ground smash to clean up the area quickly.

Rampage – Land on the ground and then engage your rage mode. When you're in rage, you can perform the ground smash simply by pressing , and it has an enormous impact. Do this, then quickly run to another group of enemy troops and smash them as well. Repeat as many times as you can before you exit rage mode.



Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM

Ratatouille

> PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360

At the main menu press start and go to the cheats menu to enter these codes.

Unlimited Running – SPEEDY

Unlock all Mini Games – MATTELME



> Wii, PLAYSTATION 2

Load your game, then go to the Extras menu and enter Gusteau's shop. In the secrets section go to code 16 and enter this code then turn it on.

Unlocks All Other Cheats – Gusteaucombo

XBOX 360



The Darkness

Using any phone in the game you can enter these numbers to hear secret messages and receive special rewards and Achievements.

Number – 555-1057
Number – 555-1847
Number – 555-1206
Number – 555-1233
Number – 555-2309
Number – 555-2349
Number – 555-2402
Number – 555-3243
Number – 555-3285
Number – 555-3840
Number – 555-3947
Number – 555-4372
Number – 555-4565
Number – 555-4569
Number – 555-5289
Number – 555-5723
Number – 555-6118

Code of the Month

Transformers



Yeah, that Transformers movie was pretty hot. We found ourselves driving just a little bit faster after we left the theater. Then we went home and tried to relive the action on the small screen. Now sure you could spend hours trying to play through the normally, but have you forgotten what section you are reading? At the very least, check out these sweet G1 repaints for some of the characters. Enter codes at the main menu where you have the option to choose from Campaign/Bonus Features/Credits. You will see a flash of light if the code is entered correctly. Note: These cheats will prevent you from gaining new Achievements.

Infinite Health – Left, Left, Up, Left, Right, Down, Right
No Ammo Reload – Up, Down, Left, Right, Up, Up, Down

No Military or Police Mode – Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right
Unlock All Mission and Extras – Down, Up, Left, Right, Right, Right, Up, Down
Unlock Alternate Optimus Prime Repaint – Down, Right, Left, Up, Down, Down, Left
Unlock Cybertron missions – Right, Up, Up, Down, Right, Left, Left
Unlock Generation 1 Jazz Repaint – Left, Up, Down, Down, Left, Up, Right
Unlock Generation 1 Megatron – Down, left, Left, Down, Right, Right, Up
Unlock Generation 1 Optimus Prime – Down, Down, Up, Up, Right, Right, Right
Unlock Generation 1 Starscream Repaint – Right, Down, Left, Left, Down, Up, Up

Betho the Firebreather
Gaylordsville, Connecticut

Xbox Live Arcade Spotlight

Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords



Anyone who's had the chance to play this remarkable puzzle/RPG on the PSP or DS knows how awesome it is that a version is coming to Live Arcade. The bad news is how little is being done to change or improve the product in the transfer – it certainly looks fine on a big TV, but it's not going to blow you away. Likewise, the gameplay appears pretty much identical in the short time we've had to play the Live Arcade version. Still, the unique combination of Bejeweled-style gem

matching with the addictive draw of ever more powerful characters is hard to beat. You'll gain new spells, weapons, and mounts while laying siege to every castle in sight, fighting a huge variety of tricky monsters, and playing through a story that easily lasts dozens of hours. Overcome that feeling you have that you'd never play one of those gem-matching games, and try this out – it is not to be missed.

Number – 555-6322
Number – 555-6325
Number – 555-6557
Number – 555-6667
Number – 555-6893
Number – 555-6969
Number – 555-7613
Number – 555-7658
Number – 555-7892
Number – 555-7934
Number – 555-8024
Number – 555-8930

Number – 555-9132
Number – 555-9528
Number – 555-9562
Number – 555-9723
Number – 555-9898
Number – 555-9985

"G1 Droid"
(location unknown – last seen writing the eighth Harry Potter book, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Pots)

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Game Design - Film & Video Production

CLASSICGI

Where The Past Comes Alive



RETURN OF THE KONG

WE TALK TO THE REIGNING DONKEY KONG CHAMPION

UNLIMITED ENABLED
You may not have seen it – you may not have even heard of it yet – but this year's biggest video game match up already happened, and it wasn't on consoles. *King of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters* hits theaters across the U.S. on August 17th. The documentary recounts the story of Steve Wiebe, high school teacher and family man, as he challenges legendary video game champ Billy Mitchell for the top score in the classic coin-op Donkey Kong. The movie is sure to please gamers and non-gamers alike, so we thought we'd sit down with Wiebe and talk to him about his favorite games, playing them competitively, and what it's like being in a documentary.

You talk a little bit about how you started playing Donkey Kong in the movie, but why did you choose Donkey Kong?

It was one of the games I heard people talking about when it first came out, and it was kind of a novel concept with the four different kinds of screens. When I first played it I fell in love with it back in '81. I never mastered it back then, but I always remembered Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, and Donkey Kong Jr. as the three games I was playing in the mid-'80s. I ran into a friend at his fraternity at the U [University of Washington], and his fraternity brother had a Donkey Kong machine, and I thought that, "Man, I gotta get myself one of those," because I remember loving the game, and it sounded cool to have one in your room, so I went and got one. I had about five people in my fraternity that loved it, and we were always playing it, and I got pretty good. Within a year of the time I got it I got a score of 500,000 or so.

How long does it take to play some of these games?

It's about two hours and 15 minutes, or two and a half hours for a single game. It could be worse. There are other games that are a marathon to play, so Donkey Kong goes by pretty quick.



And how many games will you play if you are practicing or competing?

I've done probably three games if I feel like I'm playing really well. But after two or three games you get really burned out. Focusing for that long wipes you out, so you can't really go more than two serious games. That's four or five hours, that's what makes it tough when you are going to these tournaments where you are sitting there all day. You actually get worse the more you keep playing sometimes. It kind of takes away from your energy. That's why it's hard to get a live score. If you are at a tournament, you don't have the luxury of months, you have to perform in the matter of a few days, so you feel that you have to sit there for 10 hours straight to get the most chances to do it. That's what's tough.

How did you end up getting involved with having a documentary made about you?

It was a friend of mine from high school that knew Ed [the producer] from college. When I went to my high school buddy's house I would fill him in on my Donkey Kong record, and after a while of doing this he realized that something a little over-the-top was going on, and he talked to Ed. Ed was looking for another idea for a documentary. Then I met Ed through [high school buddy] Mike and they started following a multitude of stories, not just mine. They were going into this open-minded and looking at different things like Doris Self's Q*bert to Halo to that Fatal1ty guy. They didn't know what was going to be the most interesting story.

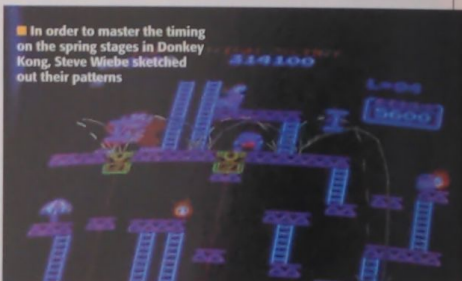
So as far as you knew you were just going to be a sidebar in this whole thing?

Yeah, at the very beginning I thought I was just going to be a just a little sidebar story from some historic arcade or current gaming documentary. It could have been that, but it ended up being the only thing.

What was the hardest part then of playing games competitively?

I don't mind people watching or cameras. People think that that puts pressure on you or whatever, but I don't really feel that pressure, but there is the time constraint. You

know when you have just a limited time to go for a record, if you are not on your game that one day then that is one day out the window. When you are at home and you are not feeling it you might go out there and just play one game, or you don't even get through a game. If you are not into it you just walk away, and try the next day, but if you are at a tournament you can't afford to do that. That's really tough.



In order to master the timing on the spring stages in Donkey Kong, Steve Wiebe sketched out their patterns

The competitive video game arena is filled with some pretty interesting characters and its own culture. What was it like being around that for the first time?

I didn't really feel any animosity from them. I didn't really feel like there was this gang or club. I knew that some of these gamers had a history; some of these gamers have been playing for 20 some years. I didn't wish to be part of the club. I was just there being myself, and I was fine with that. It didn't seem like I was being pushed out, and I wasn't exactly trying to hang out with them outside of when I was going for a record. I was cool with how everything was going down.

So they were all pretty friendly to you?

On the surface they were, but behind the scenes they were... I don't know if you've read anything about the culture, but they have a very tight-knit group that is very loyal to Billy, and you can understand that if they've been

friends with him for so long, they are going to stick together. I'm fine with that.

You have this sort of cage fight setup in the film, where both opponents are introduced at the beginning of the film, but then you never really set foot in the ring with Billy. Was that frustrating?

He was dodging me the whole time we were down there. It was frustrating because I was hoping to go head-to-head to settle any dispute, but for whatever reasons he has, he didn't want to compete. It was frustrating, but I thought, "Well, it opens the door for me to go ahead and go for the first one to get one million live." Which still hasn't been done. I'm hoping to do that. But I would have loved to have had him there and go head-to-head. That would have been great. There would have been a lot of people watching us.



Billy Mitchell

Billy Mitchell has publicly stated that he doesn't like how he was portrayed in the film. What do you think about that?

Well, he won't see the movie, and when people comment on movies they haven't seen it's kind of hard to comment back. All these people in his camp say that the movie does a disservice to Billy. They say, "Well, I haven't actually seen the movie, but I've heard..." And then they say statements that aren't even true about the movie. So that is frustrating when they aren't even willing to go see it and then they comment on it. But I do understand that if Billy did see it then I wouldn't expect him to be happy about it, but that is what the cameras caught. There is no CG Billy; it's actually him. There are no voiceover dubs. No tricks. That's what they are claiming: that we manipulated the film.

The controversy I think is good for the documentary. You know if we were friendly and shook hands before playing then no one would care, but when you have rivalry in a competition then people start going, "What is this craziness over?" So, I think it only helps the publicity for the film. Which is probably what they don't want.



A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE?

King of Kong has sparked a bit of controversy in the competitive video game community. We turned to Walter Day, founder of official video game scorekeepers Twin Galaxies (also featured in documentary), to help give us some perspective on the film's debated issues.

What was it like being in a documentary?

At the time that much of the footage was filmed at the 2005 Funspot event, there were three competing documentary film crews present, all working on independent films. It was overwhelming to have so many people demanding your time. All the players felt the same way. Many players were upset by the intrusion of the media, but they graciously accommodated the media as well as they could.

There has been some controversy surrounding the film: that certain information or facts have been left out of the film, or that it doesn't portray Billy in an accurate light. What do you think of all that?

The producers of the movie positioned Billy in an unfavorable light. Steve Wiebe is a very nice man and we stand behind his Donkey Kong high score. However, Billy is a very wonderful person, too, and he should not have been portrayed as the bad boy of the film. The producers showed tons of footage that portrayed Steve as the good guy. They could also have obtained just as much footage that shows Billy as the nice guy. However, this was not an objective documentary in my opinion, it was a scripted story and they needed a villain to play opposite Steve's good guy.

Members of the TG staff are working on a voluminous list that shows all the factual mistakes

Do you have your eyes set on any other classic games? You had the Donkey Kong Jr. high score as well.

They took that away. Donkey Kong Jr. is a little easier, well it's a lot easier actually. There are like two boards out of the four that are strictly patterns. And there is no variability, so that makes it easier, so I'd like to get that record back. It wouldn't take much to get that one; I might even do it this summer depending on what time I have. I stayed pretty much to the run and jump kind of games; Popeye, Mario Bros., Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Jr. But pretty much right now I just play Donkey Kong, and Donkey Kong Jr. I'm not like some of those gamers who are trying to get the world record on every single game.

They have a little checklist and they get one and they check it off. If you've heard of Donald Haze, He has Frogger, Joust, and a whole host of records. That's all some of these people do their whole life. I'm just a hobbyist who just happened to love Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Jr. That's pretty much my two trick pony.

So nothing new has happened since what we saw at the end of the documentary?

I haven't heard of any tapes or live events from Billy, so I'm not really going to go after anything until he responds. We'll see what he does though.

that run rampant in the KOK movie. First, Billy is portrayed as refusing to face Steve in public. This is not true. Billy and Steve agreed to meet at the 2004 Classic Gaming Expo where they played DK head-to-head. This was pointedly left out by the producers because it interfered with the theme that Billy won't face Steve.

Second, the film implies that Billy will stop at nothing to keep his DK world record. Also, not true. When Steve came on the scene in 2004, Billy had already lost the record to Tim Szczerby and it was Tim that Steve beat, not Billy.

Third, when the score from Billy's so-called glitch tape is put up on the scoreboard by myself, it is only up on the scoreboard for 48 hours before Twin Galaxies takes it down in order to perform a formal verification on Billy's score submission. That means that Steve's score of 986,500 is the world record on the TG scoreboard for the next 240 days.

One of your lines is actually a tagline for the film. You say, "One of the great rivalries of all time." Obviously, you are in a position to make this claim. Is Billy vs. Steve really one of the biggest matchups in videogame history?

In all truth, the level of skill that the two are playing on is virtually without equal.

But if he does you would jump back in?

Yeah, I would definitely do what I could to get the record back. ■ ■ ■

Editor's Note: Since the time of this interview, Billy Mitchell has taken back the top score. Only time will tell if Wiebe can beat Mitchell's new record of 1,050,200 and reclaim the title.

Interested to find out more about King of Kong: Fistful of Quarters? Make sure you check out our Unlimited section online for our interview with director Seth Gordon, plus extended interviews with Wiebe and Day.

This Month In Gaming History

On September 9, 1999, Sega launched its last video game console, the Dreamcast, in the United States. The system was short lived, selling a little over 10 million units, making it just slightly more successful than Sega's previous console, the Saturn (which sold only 9 million units). Despite a moderately successful launch and a modest but loyal fanbase, the Dreamcast only remained on retail shelves for a few brief years. Its last official US release, NHL 2K2, came out in February of 2002. Its failings have been blamed on a lack of strong third-party support and an over-hyping of the not-then-released PlayStation 2, but probably also had a great deal to do with its lack of Panzer Dragoon Saga sequels.





SEGA CD

EARTHWORM JIM SPECIAL EDITION

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER VIRGIN INTERACTIVE > DEVELOPER SHINY ENTERTAINMENT
> RELEASE 1995

It's interesting how a person's sense of humor changes over the years. Where booger jokes were once outrageous, they eventually become just disgusting. And where inappropriate farts were once hilarious they become sadly embarrassing. That's why it's impressive that Earthworm Jim – a game practically birthed from those childish constitutions – can still bring on the chuckles. When it was first released, Earthworm Jim was applauded for its detailed animations and imaginative settings. This still holds up. There is a great variety of levels. Where one minute Jim will be piloting a sub through the ocean looking for oxygen, the next minute he could be bungee jumping with a mucus monster. Even Jim's rogues' gallery remains amusing. His fight against Bob the Killer Goldfish is particularly genius. If you can find it, the Sega CD version – which features improved graphics, bigger levels, and a better soundtrack – is the definitive version.



PLAYSTATION 2

SILPHEED: THE LOST PLANET

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER GAME ARTS/TREASURE > DEVELOPER WORKING DESIGNS > RELEASE 2001

With its complicated sequel having snuck onto the 360, we thought we'd look back several years to the last installment of the series, a title that marked perhaps the very first foray into the top-down shooter realm for the PS2. While later games of that generation would blow The Lost Planet away on a graphical level, the simple shooter mechanic remains fun six years later. A few simple features set Silpheed apart from its contemporaries, namely the option to mount two different weapons simultaneously, out of an eventual choice of almost ten. Your sleek and powerful space fighter also has a life bar, eschewing the traditional one-shot one-kill feature common in the genre. This allows for a little more chaos onscreen without the difficulty rocketing into the stratosphere, and also encourages players to be a little more adventurous in their attacks. Huge parasitic alien enemies make for some great boss fights, and there's even a little primitive FMV work to be viewed between missions. Silpheed certainly didn't change anybody's world, but it's interesting how the simple gameplay of a title like this holds up, while more "complex" titles of the PS2 launch window are hard to even bear.



PC

STARLANCER

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT
> DEVELOPER DIGITAL ANVIL/WARTHOG > RELEASE 2000

Storied developers Erin and Chris Roberts did many things to promote the space combat subgenre with the iconic Wing Commander series. StarLancer, another Roberts project that made its way to Dreamcast as well as PC, focuses almost entirely on the nuts and bolts of null-G dogfighting. To some extent that's a good thing, as the mission objectives are varied enough to keep gameplay fresh throughout the lengthy campaign and the story isn't much deeper than "OMG Space Russians!" Still, this approach sacrifices some of the depth that made Wing Commander such a classic series. Online co-op is great, but the clear strength of StarLancer is solving the campaign's various tactical puzzles and executing your ideas in real time. The several craft at your disposal and the many available weapons present enough choice to create a very compelling experience. For a largely no-frills dogfighter, StarLancer delivers enough tightly crafted gameplay to overcome its thin areas and be worth your time.



ONLINE

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www.gameinformer.com

UNLIMITED LAUNCH: AUG. 17

BORDERLANDS

Check out our full interview with Gearbox president Randy Pitchford as we inject some more exclusive goodness into our Borderlands coverage.



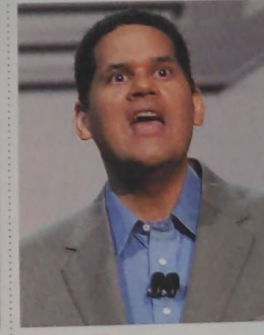
The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters

Just in time for the film's release, Ben sits down with King of Kong director Seth Gordon to discuss his documentary chronicling the showdown between arcade legends Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe.



Borderlands: Ask the Editor

Want to learn more about Gearbox's exciting new title? Send your questions in to askbryan@gameinformer.com and our smarmy, mustachioed editor will do his best to answer your questions.



Reggie Time

Read our full E3 interview with Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime to hear his take on the new Wii accessories and state of Wii Online, among other things.



E3 Wrap

You've seen the E3 Top 50 list, now check out each editor's personal Top 10 list from the show. Ben has such poor taste, doesn't he? No wonder he gets hate mail.



GI Places: Gearbox

Nick tours the esteemed halls of the talented developers that brought us Brothers in Arms and Borderlands.

nerds are for dorks
GEEKS ARE 4-EVER
hacker instead of slacker
Alpha Geek, Turbo Nerd, Proto-hacker
I'M NOT ABOUT TO TEST MY most alive when
24/7
I'm playing in the sandbox
Network guru, CGI characters
Network Security backbone
Bang the board, huge toaster
blog, command z
Pearl, Ruby and Ada
Blackberry, spamming emails and
Laptop for my boot projects, contacts
Gps to get the cheddar
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BENJAMINS BABY
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GAMEOVER

Nevermind. There's A Vita-Chamber

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Video games offer all sorts of entertaining rewards to keep players interested, but not all of them are as great as they're cracked up to be. Complete this quiz to find out which video game prize you hope you'll never get.

1 So, I hear you're pretty into Zelda, huh? Yeah, so what did the Cane of Byrna do in A Link to the Past?

- A. Freezes nearby enemies
- B. Opens a portal to the Dark World
- C. Creates blocks
- D. Creates a protective force field around you

2 In Halo, the Hierarchs are three high prophets who lead the various races of the Covenant. If you were a Brute bouncer outside the high prophet council chamber, who should you kick out?

- A. The Prophet of Truth
- B. The Prophet of Mercy
- C. The Prophet of Justice
- D. The Prophet of Regret



3 Super Joe was pretty awesome, unlike some Joes we know. We're not naming any names, mind you. Anyway, which of these arcade games didn't star Super Joe?

- A. Speed Rumbler
- B. Bionic Commando
- C. Battlezone
- D. Commando

4 Who made Super Turrican? What, too hard? Fine, here's a hint. We reviewed one of their games this month.

- A. Factor 5
- B. Capcom
- C. Electronic Arts
- D. Blizzard



5 People love to debate which character was the best in Super Mario Bros. 2, but there's no debating who would win a long jump contest, right?

- A. Mario
- B. Luigi
- C. Toad
- D. Princess Toadstool (Peach, if you prefer)



6 Need for Speed: Most Wanted had you driving the streets, taking down the infamous racers on your black list. Of these four, which was the one you raced last?

- A. Izzy
- B. Ronnie
- C. Taz
- D. Jewels

7 Castlevania has always been pretty awesome, but they're certainly not going to perk you up if you're feeling blue. Which morose Castlevania subtitle never existed?

- A. Legacy of Darkness
- B. Simon's Adventure
- C. Dracula's Curse
- D. Circle of the Moon



8 Rosco McQueen...

- A. Firefighter Extreme!
- B. Vegas Card Counting Scheme!
- C. Loves Franks and Beans!
- D. Ain't Getting A Sequel!



9 Make My Video was the subtitle for several '90s Sega CD titles. One of these bands didn't make the list. Which one?

- A. Kris Kross
- B. Blind Melon
- C. INXS
- D. Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch

10 Whose house?

- A. Mario's house
- B. Master Chief's house
- C. Kratos' house
- D. Run's house

BREAKDOWN

38 is the new name of Green Monster Games, a studio founded by Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling. Spawn mastermind Todd McFarlane, and author R.A. Salvatore. We're thinking twin-similar wielding demons playing baseball may figure in their next game — just a guess

83% of casual gamers indicated their willingness to watch a 30-second ad in order to play a game for free, according to a recent survey

5 is still more than four, if anybody is counting

3 How many teams Blizzard currently has working on different projects right now. So, that would be World of Warcraft, Starcraft II, and...

4 The number of Metal Gear Solid games that will ever exist, according to creator Hideo Kojima

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:
Mario's Mustache



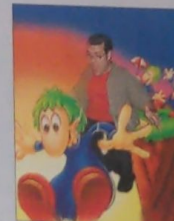
2-3:
Oblivion Gate:
The Home Edition



4-5:
Sonic's Color Scheme



6-7:
A Personalized
Visit From Kratos



8-9:
A Chance To Run
With The Lemmings



10:
Achievement Unlocked:
Red Ring of Death

Dell recommends Windows Vista® Home Premium.



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Feels like sliding
down a bobsled run
in a bathing suit.



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